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WORK:

A STORY OF EXPERIENCE.

By LOUISA M. ALCOTT,

AUTHOR OF "LITTLE WOMEN," "AN OLD-FASHIONED GIRL,"
"LITTLE MEN," "HOSPITAL SKETCHES," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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TO

MY MOTHER,

WHOSE LIFE HAS BEEN A LONG LABOUR OF LOVE,

THIS BOOK IS GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED

BY

HER DAUGHTER.

2203237

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WORK;

OR, CHRISTIE'S EXPERIMENT.

CHAPTER I.

CHRISTIE.

"AUNT BETSEY, there's going to be a new Declaration of Independence."

"Bless and save us, what do you mean, child?" And the startled old lady precipitated a pie into the oven with destructive haste.

"I mean that, being of age, I'm going to take care of myself, and not be a burden any longer. Uncle wishes me out of the way, thinks I ought to go, and sooner or later will tell me so. I don't intend to wait for that, but, like the people in fairy tales, travel away into the world and seek my fortune. I know I can find it."

Christie emphasized her speech by energetic demonstrations in the bread-trough, kneading the dough as if it was her destiny, and she was shaping it to suit herself; while Aunt Betsey stood listening with uplifted pie-fork, and as much astonishment as her placid face was capable of expressing. As the girl paused with a decided thump, the old lady exclaimed,—

"What crazy idea have you got into your head now?"

"A very sane and sensible one that's got to be worked out, so please listen to it, ma'am. I've had it a good while. I've thought it over thoroughly, and I'm sure it's the right thing for me to do. I'm old enough to take care of myself; and if I'd been a boy, I should have been told to do it long ago. I hate to be dependent; and now there's no need of it, I can't bear it any longer. If you were poor, I wouldn't leave you; for I never forget how kind *you* have been to me. But uncle doesn't love or understand me; I *am* a burden to him, and I must go where I can take care of myself. I can't be happy till I

do, for there's nothing here for me. I'm sick of this dull town, where the one idea is eat, drink, and get rich; I don't find any friends to help me as I want to be helped, or any work that I can do well; so let me go, aunty, and find my place, wherever it is."

"But I do need you, deary; and you mustn't think uncle don't like you. He does, only he don't show it; and when your odd ways fret him, he ain't pleasant, I know. I don't see why you can't be contented; I've lived here all my days, and never found the place lonesome, or the folks unneighbourly." And Aunt Betsey looked perplexed by the new idea.

"You and I are very different, ma'am. There was more yeast put into my composition, I guess; and after standing quiet in a warm corner so long, I begin to ferment, and ought to be kneaded up in time, so that I may turn out a wholesome loaf. You can't do this; so let me go where it can be done, else I shall turn sour and good for nothing. Does that make the matter any clearer?" And Christie's serious face relaxed into a

smile as her aunt's eye went from her to the nicely-moulded loaf offered as an illustration.

"I see what you mean, Kitty; but I never thought on't before. You be better viz than me; though, let me tell you, too much emptins makes bread poor stuff, like baker's trash; and too much workin' up makes it hard and dry. Now fly around, for the big oven is most het, and this cake takes a sight of time in the mixin'."

"You haven't said I might go, aunty," began the girl, after a long pause, devoted by the old lady to the preparation of some compound which seemed to require great nicety of measurement in its ingredients; for when she replied, Aunt Betsey curiously interlarded her speech with audible directions to herself from the receipt-book before her.

"I ain't no right to keep you, dear, ef you choose to take (a pinch of salt). I'm sorry you ain't happy, and think you might ef you'd only (beat six eggs yolks and whites together). But ef you can't and feel that you need (two cups of sugar), only speak to uncle, and ef he says (a squeeze of fresh lemon), go, my

dear, and take my blessin' with you (not forgettin' to cover with a piece of paper)."

Christie's laugh echoed through the kitchen; and the old lady smiled benignly, quite unconscious of the cause of the girl's merriment.

"I shall ask uncle to-night, and I know he won't object. Then I shall write to see if Mrs. Flint has a room for me, where I can stay till I get something to do. There is plenty of work in the world, and I'm not afraid of it; so you'll soon hear good news of me. Don't look sad, for you know I never could forget *you*, even if I should become the greatest lady in the land." And Christie left the prints of two floury but affectionate hands on the old lady's shoulders, as she kissed the wrinkled face that had never worn a frown to her.

Full of hopeful fancies, Christie salted the pans and buttered the dough in pleasant forgetfulness of all mundane affairs, and the ludicrous dismay of Aunt Betsey, who followed her about, rectifying her mistakes, and watching over her as if this sudden absence

of mind had roused suspicions of her sanity.

"Uncle, I want to go away, and get my own living, if you please," was Christie's abrupt beginning, as they sat round the evening fire.

"Hey! what's that?" said Uncle Enos, rousing from the doze he was enjoying, with the candle in perilous proximity to his newspaper and his nose.

Christie repeated her request, and was much relieved when, after a meditative stare, the old man briefly answered,—

"Wal, go ahead."

"I was afraid you might think it rash or silly, sir."

"I think it's the best thing you could do; and I like your good sense in pupposin' on't."

"Then I may really go?"

"Soon 's ever you like. Don't pester me about it till you're ready; then I'll give you a little suthing to start off with." And Uncle Enos returned to *The Farmer's Friend*, as if cattle were more interesting than kindred.

Christie, accustomed to his curt speech and careless manner, had expected nothing more cordial, and, turning to her aunt, said rather bitterly,—

"Didn't I tell you he'd be glad to have me go? No matter! When I've done something to be proud of, he will be as glad to see me back again." Then her voice changed, her eyes kindled, and the firm lips softened into a smile. "Yes, I'll try my experiment; then I'll get rich, found a home for girls like myself, or, better still, be a Mrs. Fry, a Florence Nightingale, or—"

"How are you on't for stockings, dear?"

Christie's castles in the air vanished at the prosaic question; but, after a blank look, she answered pleasantly,—

"Thank you for bringing me down to my feet again, when I was soaring away too far and too fast. I'm poorly off, ma'am; but if you are knitting these for me, I shall certainly start on a firm foundation."

And, leaning on Aunt Betsey's knee, she patiently discussed the wardrobe question from hose to head-gear.

"Don't you think you could be contented any way, Christie, ef I make the work lighter, and leave you more time for your books and things?" asked the old lady, loth to lose the one youthful element in her quiet life.

"No, ma'am, for I can't find what I want here," was the decided answer.

"What do you want, child?"

"Look in the fire, and I'll try to show you."

The old lady obediently turned her spectacles that way; and Christie said, in a tone half serious, half playful,—

"Do you see those two logs? Well, that one smouldering dismally away in the corner is what my life is now; the other blazing and singing is what I want my life to be."

"Bless me, what an idee! They are both a-burnin' where they are put, and both will be ashes to-morrow; so what difference does it make?"

Christie smiled at the literal old lady; but, following the fancy that pleased her, she added earnestly,—

"I know the end is the same; but it *does* make a difference *how* they turn to ashes, and *how* I spend my life. That log, with its one dull spot of fire, gives neither light nor warmth, but lies sizzing despondently among the cinders. But the other glows from end to end with cheerful little flames that go singing up the chimney with a pleasant sound. Its light fills the room and shines out into the dark; its warmth draws us nearer, making the hearth the cosiest place in the house, and we shall all miss the friendly blaze when it dies. Yes," she added, as if to herself, "I hope my life may be like that, so that, whether it be long or short, it will be useful and cheerful while it lasts, will be missed when it ends, and leave something behind besides ashes."

Though she only half understood them, the girl's words touched the kind old lady, and made her look anxiously at the eager young face gazing so wistfully into the fire.

"A good smart blowin' up with the belluses would make the green stick burn most as well as the dry one after a spell. I guess

contentedness is the bellus for young folk, ef they would only think so."

"I daresay you are right, aunty; but I want to try for myself; and if I fail, I'll come back and follow your advice. Young folks always have discontented fits, you know. Didn't you when you were a girl?"

"Shouldn't wonder ef I did; but Enos came along, and I forgot 'em."

"My Enos has not come along yet, and never may; so I'm not going to sit and wait for any man to give me independence, if I can earn it for myself." And a quick glance at the gruff, grey old man in the corner plainly betrayed that, in Christie's opinion, Aunt Betsey made a bad bargain when she exchanged her girlish aspirations for a man whose soul was in his pocket.

"Jest like her mother, full of hifalutin notions, discontented and sot in her own idees. Poor capital to start a fortin' on."

Christie's eye met that of her uncle peering over the top of his paper with an expression that always tried her patience. Now it was

like a dash of cold water on her enthusiasm, and her face fell as she asked quickly,—

"How do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that you are startin' all wrong; your redic'lus notions about independence and self-cultur won't come to nothin' in the long-run, and you'll make as bad a failure of your life as your mother did of her'n."

"Please don't say that to me; I can't bear it, for I shall never think her life a failure, because she tried to help herself, and married a good man, in spite of poverty, when she loved him! You call that folly, but I'll do the same if I can; and I'd rather have what my father and mother left me, than all the money you are piling up, just for the pleasure of being richer than your neighbours."

"Never mind, dear! he don't mean no harm!" whispered Aunt Betsey, fearing a storm.

But though Christie's eyes had kindled and her colour deepened, her voice was low and steady, and her indignation was one of the inward sort.

"Uncle likes to try me by saying such

things, and this is one reason why I want to go away before I get sharp and bitter and distrustful as he is. I don't suppose I can make you understand my feelings, but I'd like to try, and then I'll never speak of it again;" and, carefully controlling voice and face, Christie slowly added, with a look that would have been pathetically eloquent to one who could have understood the instincts of a strong nature for light and freedom, "You say I am discontented, proud, and ambitious; that's true, and I'm glad of it. I am discontented, because I can't help feeling that there is a better sort of life than this dull one made up of everlasting work, with no object but money. I can't starve my soul for the sake of my body, and I mean to get out of the treadmill if I can. I'm proud, as you call it, because I hate dependence where there isn't any love to make it bearable. You don't say so in words, but I know you begrudge me a home, though you will call me ungrateful when I'm gone. I'm willing to work, but I want work that I can put my heart into, and feel that it does me good, no

matter how hard it is. I only ask for a chance to be a useful, happy woman, and I don't think that is a bad ambition. Even if I only do what my dear mother did, earn my living honestly and happily, and leave a beautiful example behind me, to help one other woman as hers helps me, I shall be satisfied."

Christie's voice faltered over the last words, for the thoughts and feelings which had been working within her during the last few days had stirred her deeply, and the resolution to cut loose from the old life had not been lightly made. Mr. Devon had listened behind his paper to this unusual outpouring with a sense of discomfort which was new to him. But though the words reproached and annoyed, they did not soften him, and when Christie paused with tearful eyes, her uncle rose, saying slowly, as he lighted his candle,—

"Ef I'd refused to let you go before, I'd agree to it now; for you need breakin' in, my girl, and you are goin' where you'll get it, so the sooner you're off the better for all on

us. Come, Betsey, we may as wal leave, for we can't understand the wants of her higher nater, as Christie calls it, and we've had lecterin' enough for one night." And with a grim laugh the old man quitted the field, worsted but in good order.

"There, there, dear, hev a good cry, and forgit all about it!" purred Aunt Betsey, as the heavy footsteps creaked away, for the good soul had a most old-fashioned and dutiful awe of her lord and master.

"I shan't cry, but act; for it is high time I *was* off. I've stayed for your sake; now I'm more trouble than comfort, and away I go. Good night, my dear old aunty, and don't look troubled, for I'll be a lamb while I stay."

Having kissed the old lady, Christie swept her work away, and sat down to write the letter which was the first step towards freedom. When it was done, she drew nearer to her friendly *confidante*, the fire, and till late into the night sat thinking tenderly of the past, bravely of the present, hopefully of the future. Twenty-one to-morrow, and

her inheritance a head, a heart, a pair of hands; also the dower of most New England girls, intelligence, courage, and common-sense, many practical gifts, and, hidden under the shy pride that soon melts in a genial atmosphere, much romance and enthusiasm, and the spirit which can rise to heroism when the great moment comes.

Christie was one of that large class of women who, moderately endowed with talents, earnest and true-hearted, are driven by necessity, temperament, or principle out into the world to find support, happiness, and homes for themselves. Many turn back discouraged; more accept shadow for substance, and discover their mistake too late: the weakest lose their purpose and themselves, but the strongest struggle on, and, after danger and defeat, earn at last the best success this world can give us, the possession of a brave and cheerful spirit, rich in self-knowledge, self-control, self-help. This was the real desire of Christie's heart, this was to be her lesson and reward, and to this happy end she

was slowly yet surely brought by the long discipline of life and labour.

Sitting alone there in the night, she tried to strengthen herself with all the good and helpful memories she could recall, before she went away to find her place in the great unknown world. She thought of her mother, so like herself, who had borne the commonplace life of home till she could bear it no longer. Then had gone away to teach, as most country-girls are forced to do. Had met, loved, and married a poor gentleman, and, after a few years of genuine happiness, untroubled even by much care and poverty, had followed him out of the world, leaving her little child to the protection of her brother.

Christie looked back over the long, lonely years she had spent in the old farmhouse, plodding to school and church, and doing her task with kind Aunt Betsey while a child; and slowly growing into girlhood, with a world of romance locked up in a heart hungry for love and a larger, nobler life.

She had tried to appease this hunger in

many ways, but found little help. Her father's old books were all she could command, and these she wore out with much reading. Inheriting his refined tastes, she found nothing to attract her in the society of the common-place and often coarse people about her. She tried to like the buxom girls whose one ambition was to "get married," and whose only subjects of conversation were "smart bunnits" and "nice dresses." She tried to believe that the admiration and regard of the bluff young farmers was worth striving for; but when one well-to-do neighbour laid his acres at her feet, she found it impossible to accept for her life's companion a man whose soul was wrapped up in prize cattle and big turnips.

Uncle Enos never could forgive her for this piece of folly, and Christie plainly saw that one of three things would surely happen, if she lived on there with no vent for full heart and busy mind. She would either marry Joe Butterfield in sheer desperation, and become a farmer's household drudge; settle down into a sour spinster, content to

make butter, gossip, and lay up money all her days; or do what poor Matty Stone had done, try to crush and curb her needs and aspirations till the struggle grew too hard, and then in a fit of despair end her life, and leave a tragic story to haunt their quiet river.

To escape these fates but one way appeared, to break loose from this narrow life, and go out into the world and see what she could do for herself. This idea was full of enchantment to the eager girl, and, after much earnest thought, she had resolved to try it.

"If I fail, I can come back," she said to herself, even while she scorned the thought of failure, for with all her shy pride she was both brave and ardent, and her dreams were of the rosiest sort.

"I won't marry Joe; I won't wear myself out in a district-school for the mean sum they give a woman; I won't delve away here where I'm not wanted; and I won't end my life like a coward, because it is dull and hard. I'll try my fate as mother did, and perhaps I may succeed as well." And Christie's thoughts went wandering away into the dim,

sweet past when she, a happy child, lived with loving parents in a different world from that.

Lost in these tender memories, she sat till the old moon-faced clock behind the door struck twelve, then the visions vanished, leaving their benison behind them.

As she glanced backward at the smouldering fire, a slender spire of flame shot up from the log that had blazed so cheerily, and shone upon her as she went. A good omen, gratefully accepted then, and remembered often in the years to come.

CHAPTER II.

SERVANT.

A FORTNIGHT later, and Christie was off. Mrs. Flint had briefly answered that she had a room, and that work was always to be found in the city. So the girl packed her little trunk, folding away splendid hopes among her plain gowns, and filling every corner with the happy fancies, utterly impossible plans, and tender little dreams, so lovely at the time, so pathetic to remember, when contact with the hard realities of life has collapsed our bright bubbles, and the frost of disappointment nipped all our morning glories in their prime.

The old red stage stopped at Enos Devon's door, and his niece crossed the threshold after a cool hand-shake with the master of the

house, and a close embrace with the mistress, who stood pouring out last words with spectacles too dim for seeing. Fat Ben swung up the trunk, slammed the door, mounted his perch, and the ancient vehicle swayed with premonitory symptoms of departure.

Then something smote Christie's heart. "Stop!" she cried, and, springing out, ran back into the dismal room where the old man sat. Straight up to him she went with outstretched hands, saying steadily, though her face was full of feeling,—

"Uncle, I'm not satisfied with that good-bye. I don't mean to be sentimental, but I do want to say, 'Forgive me!' I see now that I might have made you sorry to part with me, if I had tried to make you love me more. It's too late now, but I'm not too proud to confess when I'm wrong; I want to part kindly; I ask your pardon. I thank you for all you've done for me, and I say good-bye affectionately now."

Mr. Devon had a heart somewhere, though it seldom troubled him; but it did make itself felt when the girl looked at him with his

dead sister's eyes, and spoke in a tone whose unaccustomed tenderness was a reproach.

Conscience had pricked him more than once that week, and he was glad to own it now; his rough sense of honour was touched by her frank expression, and, as he answered, his hand was offered readily.

"I like that, Kitty, and think the better of you for't. Let bygones be bygones. I gen'lly get as good as I give, and I guess I deserved some on't. I wish you wal, my girl. I heartily wish you wal, and hope you won't forgit that the old house ain't never shet aginst you."

Christie astonished him with a cordial kiss; then bestowing another warm hug on Aunt Niobe, as she called the old lady in a tearful joke, she ran into the carriage, taking with her all the sunshine of the place.

Christie found Mrs. Flint a dreary woman, with "Boarders" written all over her sour face and faded figure. Butchers' bills and house-rent seemed to fill her eyes with sleepless anxiety; thriftless cooks and saucy housemaids to sharpen the tones of her shrill voice;

and an incapable husband to burden her shoulders like a modern "Old man of the sea."

A little room far up in the tall house was at the girl's disposal for a reasonable sum, and she took possession, feeling very rich with the hundred dollars Uncle Enos gave her, and delightfully independent with no milk-pans to scald, no heavy lover to elude, no hum-drum district-school to imprison her day after day.

For a week she enjoyed her liberty heartily, then set about finding something to do. Her wish was to be a governess, that being the usual refuge for respectable girls who have a living to get. But Christie soon found her want of accomplishments a barrier to success in that line, for mammas thought less of the solid than of the ornamental branches, and wished their little darlings to learn French before English, music before grammar, and drawing before writing.

So, after several disappointments, Christie decided that her education was too old-fashioned for the city, and gave up the idea

of teaching. Sewing she resolved not to try till everything else failed; and, after a few more attempts to get writing to do, she said to herself, in a fit of humility and good sense, "I'll begin at the beginning, and work my way up. I'll put my pride in my pocket, and go out to service. Housework I like, and can do well, thanks to Aunt Betsy. I never thought it degradation to do it for her, so why should I mind doing it for others, if they pay for it? It isn't what I want, but it's better than idleness, so I'll try it!"

Full of this wise resolution, she took to hunting that purgatory of the poor, an intelligence office. Mrs. Flint gave her a recommendation, and she hopefully took her place among the ranks of buxom German, incapable Irish, and "smart" American women; for in those days foreign help had not driven farmers' daughters out of the field, and made domestic comfort a lost art.

At first Christie enjoyed the novelty of the thing, and watched with interest the anxious housewives who flocked in demanding that

rara avis, an angel at nine shillings a week; and, not finding it, bewailed the degeneracy of the times. But too honest to profess herself absolutely perfect in every known branch of housework, it was some time before she suited herself. Meanwhile, she was questioned, and lectured, half-engaged and kept waiting, dismissed for a whim, and so worried that she began to regard herself as the incarnation of all human vanities and shortcomings.

"A desirable place in a small, genteel family," was at last offered her, and she posted away to secure it, having reached a state of desperation, and resolved to go as a first-class cook rather than sit with her hands before her any longer.

A well-appointed house, good wages, and light duties seemed things to be grateful for, and Christie decided that going out to service was not the hardest fate in life, as she stood at the door of a handsome house in a sunny square, waiting to be inspected.

Mrs. Stuart, having just returned from Italy, affected the artistic, and the new

applicant found her with a Roman scarf about her head, a rosary like a string of small cannon-balls at her side, and azure draperies which became her as well as they did the sea-green furniture of her marine boudoir, where unwary walkers tripped over coral and shells; grew sea-sick looking at pictures of tempestuous billows engulfing every sort of craft, from a man-of-war to a hencoop with a ghostly young lady clinging to it with one hand; and had their appetites effectually taken away by a choice collection of water-bugs and snakes in a glass globe, that looked like a jar of mixed pickles in a state of agitation.

Madam was intent on a water-colour copy of Turner's "Rain, Wind, and Hail," that pleasing work which was sold upside down, and no one found it out. Motioning Christie to a seat, she finished some delicate sloppy process before speaking. In that little pause Christie examined her, and the impression then received was afterwards confirmed.

Mrs. Stuart possessed some beauty, and chose to think herself a queen of society.

She assumed majestic manners in public, and could not entirely divest herself of them in private, which often produced comic effects. Zenobia troubled about fish-sauce, or Aspasia indignant at the price of eggs, will give some idea of this lady when she condescended to the cares of housekeeping.

Presently she looked up and inspected the girl as if a new servant were no more than a new bonnet, a necessary article to be ordered home for examination. Christie presented her recommendation, made her modest little speech, and awaited her doom.

Mrs. Stuart read, listened, and then demanded with queenly brevity,—

"Your name?"

"Christie Devon."

"Too long; I should prefer to call you Jane, as I am accustomed to the name."

"As you please, ma'am."

"Your age?"

"Twenty-one."

"You are an American?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Mrs. Stuart gazed into space a moment,

and then delivered the following address with impressive solemnity,—

"I wish a capable, intelligent, honest, well-conducted person who knows her place and keeps it. The work is light, as there are but two in the family. I am very particular, and so is Mr. Stuart. I pay two dollars and a half, allow one afternoon out, one service on Sunday, and no followers. My table-girl must understand her duties thoroughly, be extremely neat, and always wear white aprons."

"I think I can suit you, ma'am, when I have learned the ways of the house," meekly replied Christie.

Mrs. Stuart looked graciously satisfied, and returned the paper with a gesture that Victoria might have used in restoring a granted petition, though her next words rather marred the effect of the regal act, "My cook is black."

"I have no objection to colour, ma'am."

An expression of relief dawned upon Mrs. Stuart's countenance, for the black cook had been an insurmountable obstacle to all the

Irish ladies who had applied. Thoughtfully tapping her Roman nose with the handle of her brush, Madame took another survey of the new applicant, and seeing that she looked neat, intelligent, and respectful, gave a sigh of thankfulness, and engaged her on the spot.

Much elated, Christie rushed home, selected a bag of necessary articles, bundled the rest of her possessions into an empty closet (lent her rent-free owing to a profusion of cock-roaches), paid up her board, and at two o'clock introduced herself to Hepsey Johnson, her fellow-servant.

Hepsey was a tall, gaunt woman, bearing the tragedy of her race written in her face, with its melancholy eyes, subdued expression, and the pathetic patience of a wronged dumb animal. She received Christie with an air of resignation, and speedily bewildered her with an account of the duties she would be expected to perform.

A long and careful drill enabled Christie to set the table with but few mistakes, and to retain a tolerably clear recollection of the order

of performances. She had just assumed her badge of servitude, as she called the white apron, when the bell rang violently, and Hepsey, who was hurrying away to "dish up," said,—

"It's de marster. You has to answer de bell, honey, and he likes it done bery spry."

Christie ran, and admitted an impetuous, stout gentleman, who appeared to be incensed against the elements, for he burst in as if blown, shook himself like a Newfoundland dog, and said all in one breath,—

"You're the new girl, are you? Well, take my umbrella and pull off my rubbers."

"Sir?"

Mr. Stuart was struggling with his gloves, and, quite unconscious of the astonishment of his new maid, impatiently repeated his request.

"Take this wet thing away, and pull off my overshoes. Don't you see it's raining like the very deuce?"

Christie folded her lips together in a peculiar manner as she knelt down and removed a

pair of muddy overshoes, took the dripping umbrella, and was walking away with her agreeable burden, when Mr. Stuart gave her another shock, by calling over the bannister,—

"I'm going out again, so clean those rubbers, and see that the boots I sent down this morning are in order."

"Yes, sir," answered Christie meekly, and immediately startled Hepsey by casting overshoes and umbrella upon the kitchen floor, and indignantly demanding,—

"Am I expected to be a boot-jack to that man?"

"I spects you is, honey."

"Am I also expected to clean his boots?"

"Yes, chile. Katty did, and de work ain't hard when you gits used to it."

"It isn't the work; it's the degradation; and I won't submit to it."

Christie looked fiercely determined; but Hepsey shook her head, saying quietly, as she went on garnishing a dish,—

"Dere's more 'gradin' works dan dat, chile,

and dem dat's been 'bliged to do um finds dis sort bery easy. You's paid for it, honey; and if you does it willin, it won't hurt you more dan washin' de marster's dishes, or sweepin' his rooms."

"There ought to be a boy to do this sort of thing. Do you think it's right to ask it of me?" cried Christie, feeling that being servant was not as pleasant a task as she had thought it.

"Dunno, chile. I'se shore I'd never ask it of any woman if I was a man, 'less I was sick or ole. But folks don't seem to 'member we've got feelins, and de best way is not to mind dese ere little trubbles. You jes leave de boots to me; blackin' can't do dese ole hands no hurt, and dis ain't no deggydation to me now: I'se a free woman."

"Why, Hepsey, were you ever a slave?" asked the girl, forgetting her own small injury at this suggestion of the greatest of all wrongs.

"All my life, till I run away five year ago. My ole folks, eight brudders and sisters, is down dere in de pit now, waitin' for de Lord

to set 'em free. And He's gwine to do it soon, *soon!*" As she uttered the last words, a sudden light chased the tragic shadow from Hepsey's face, and the solemn fervour of her voice thrilled Christie's heart. All her anger died out in a great pity, and she put her hand on the woman's shoulder, saying earnestly,—

"I hope so; and I wish I could help to bring that happy day at once!"

For the first time Hepsey smiled, as she said gratefully, "De Lord bress you for dat wish, chile." Then dropping suddenly into her old quiet way, she added, turning to her work,—

"Now you tote up de dinner, and I'll be handy by to 'fresh your mind 'bout how de dishes goes, for missis is bery 'ticular, and don't like no 'stakes in tendin'."

Thanks to her own neat-handed ways and Hepsey's prompting through the slide, Christie got on very well; managed her salver dexterously, only upset one glass, clashed one dish-cover, and forgot to sugar the pie before putting it on the table, an

omission which was majestically pointed out, and graciously pardoned as a first offence.

By seven o'clock the ceremonial was fairly over, and Christie dropped into a chair, quite tired out with frequent pacings to and fro. In the kitchen she found the table spread for one, and Hepsey busy with the boots.

"Aren't you coming to your dinner, Mrs. Johnson?" she asked, not pleased at the arrangement.

"When you's done, honey; dere's no hurry 'bout me. Katy liked dat way best, and I'se used ter waitin'."

"But *I* don't like that way, and I won't have it. I suppose Katy thought her white skin gave her a right to be disrespectful to a woman old enough to be her mother, just because she was black. I don't; and while I'm here there must be no difference made. If we can work together, we can eat together; and because you have been a slave is all the more reason I should be good to you now."

If Hepsey had been surprised by the new

girl's protest against being made a boot-jack of, she was still more surprised at this sudden kindness, for she had set Christie down in her own mind as "one ob dem toppin' smart ones dat don't stay long nowheres." She changed her opinion now, and sat watching the girl with a new expression on her face, as Christie took boot and brush from her, and fell to work energetically, saying, as she scrubbed,—

"I'm ashamed of complaining about such a little thing as this, and don't mean to feel degraded by it, though I should by letting you do it for me. I never lived out before—that's the reason I made a fuss. There's a polish for you! and I'm in a good humour again; so Mr. Stuart may call for his boots whenever he likes, and we'll go to dinner like fashionable people, as we are."

There was something so irresistible in the girl's hearty manner, that Hepsey submitted at once with a visible satisfaction, which gave a relish to Christie's dinner, though it was eaten at a kitchen-table, with a bare-armed cook sitting opposite, and three rows of

burnished dish-covers reflecting the dreadful spectacle.

After this Christie got on excellently, for she put her heart into her work, and found both pleasure and profit in her new employment. It gave her real satisfaction to keep the handsome rooms in order, to polish plate, and spread bountiful meals. There was an atmosphere of ease and comfort about her which contrasted agreeably with the shabbiness of Mrs. Flint's boarding-house and the bare simplicity of the old home. Like most young people, Christie loved luxury, and was sensible enough to see and value the comforts of her situation, and to wonder why more girls placed as she was did not choose a life like this rather than the confinement of a sewing-room or the fatigue and publicity of a shop.

Christie did not learn to love her mistress, because Mrs. Stuart evidently considered herself as one belonging to a superior race of beings and had no desire to establish any of the friendly relations that may become so helpful and pleasant to both mistress and

maid. She made a royal progress through her dominions every morning, issued orders, found fault liberally, bestowed praise sparingly, and took no more personal interest in her servants than if they were clocks, to be wound up once a day and sent away the moment they got out of repair.

Mr. Stuart was absent from morning till night, and all Christie ever knew about him was that he was a kind-hearted, hot-tempered, and very conceited man; fond of his wife, proud of the society they managed to draw about them, and bent on making his way in the world at any cost.

If masters and mistresses knew how skilfully they are studied, criticized, and imitated by their servants, they would take more heed to their ways and set better examples, perhaps. Mrs. Stuart never dreamed that her quiet, respectful Jane kept a sharp eye on all her movements, smiled covertly at her affectations, envied her accomplishments, and practised certain little elegancies that struck her fancy.

Mr. Stuart would have become apoplectic

with indignation if he had known that this too-intelligent table-girl often contrasted her master with his guests, and dared to think him wanting in good breeding when he boasted of his money, flattered a great man, or laid plans to lure some lion into his house. When he lost his temper she always wanted to laugh, he bounced and bumbled about so like an angry blue-bottle fly; and when he got himself up elaborately for a party, this disrespectful huzzy confided to Hepsey her opinion that "master was a fat dandy, with nothing to be vain of but his whiskers," a sacrilegious remark which would have caused her to be summarily ejected from the house if it had reached the august ears of master or mistress.

"My father was a gentleman; and I shall never forget it, though I do go out to service. I've got no rich friends to help me up, but, sooner or later, I mean to find a place among cultivated people; and while I'm working and waiting I can be fitting myself to fill that place like a gentlewoman, as I am."

With this ambition in her mind, Christie took notes of all that went on in the polite world, of which she got frequent glimpses while "living out." Mrs. Stuart received one evening of each week, and on these occasions Christie, with an extra frill on her white apron, served the company, and enjoyed herself more than they did, if the truth had been known.

While helping the ladies with their wraps she observed what they wore, how they carried themselves, and what a vast amount of prinking they did, not to mention the flood of gossip they talked while shaking out their flounces and settling their topknots.

Later in the evening, when she passed cups and glasses, this demure-looking damsel heard much fine discourse, saw many famous beings, and improved her mind with surreptitious studies of the rich and great when on parade. But her best time was after supper, when, through the crack of the door of the little room where she was supposed to be clearing away the relics of the feast, she looked and listened at her ease; laughed at the wits,

stared at the lions, heard the music, was impressed by the wisdom, and much edified by the gentility of the whole affair.

After a time, however, Christie got rather tired of it, for there was an elegant sameness about these evenings that became intensely wearisome to the uninitiated, but she fancied that as each had his part to play he managed to do it with spirit. Night after night the wag told his stories, the poet read his poems, the singers warbled, the pretty women simpered and dressed, the heavy scientific was duly discussed by the elect precious, and Mrs. Stuart, in amazing costumes, sailed to and fro in her most swan-like manner; while my lord stirred up the lions he had captured, till they roared their best, great and small.

"Good heavens! why don't they do or say something new and interesting, and not keep twaddling on about art, and music, and poetry, and cosmos? The papers are full of appeals for help for the poor, reforms of all sorts, and splendid work that others are doing; but these people seem to think it isn't genteel enough to be spoken of here! I

suppose it is all very elegant to go on like a set of trained canaries, but it's very dull fun to watch them, and Hepsey's stories are a deal more interesting to me."

Having come to this conclusion, after studying dilettanteism through the crack of the door for some months, Christie left the "trained canaries" to twitter and hop about their gilded cage and devoted herself to Hepsey, who gave her glimpses into another sort of life, so bitterly real that she never could forget it.

Friendship had prospered in the lower regions, for Hepsey had a motherly heart, and Christie soon won her confidence by bestowing her own. Her story was like many another; yet, being the first Christie had ever heard, and told with the unconscious eloquence of one who had suffered and escaped, it made a deep impression on her, bringing home to her a sense of obligation so forcibly that she began at once to pay a little part of the great debt which the white race owes the black.

Christie loved books; and the attic next

her own was full of them. To this store she found her way by a sort of instinct as sure as that which leads a fly to a honey-pot, and, finding many novels, she read her fill. This amusement lightened many heavy hours, peopled the silent house with troops of friends, and, for a time, was the joy of her life.

Hepsey used to watch her as she sat buried in her book when the day's work was done, and once a heavy sigh roused Christie from the most exciting crisis of "The Abbot."

"What's the matter? Are you very tired, aunty?" she asked, using the name that came most readily to her lips.

"No, honey; I was only wishin' I could read fast, like you does. I'se berry slow 'bout readin' and I want to learn a heap," answered Hepsey, with such a wistful look in her soft eyes that Christie shut her book, saying briskly,—

"Then I'll teach you. Bring out your primer, and let's begin at once."

"Dear chile, it's orful hard work to put learnin' in my ole head, and I wouldn't 'cept such a ting from you only I needs dis sort of

help so bad, and I can trust you to gib it to me as I wants it."

Then, in a whisper that went straight to Christie's heart, Hepsey told her plan and showed what help she craved.

For five years she had worked hard and saved her earnings for the purpose of her life. When a considerable sum had been hoarded up she confided it to one whom she believed to be a friend, and sent him to buy her old mother. But he proved false, and she never saw either mother or money. It was a hard blow, but she took heart and went to work again, resolving this time to trust no one with the dangerous part of the affair, but when she had scraped together enough to pay her way she meant to go South and steal her mother at the risk of her life.

"I don't want much money, but I must know little 'bout readin' and countin' up, else I'll get lost and cheated. You'll help me do dis, honey? and I'll bless you all my days, and so will my old mammy, if I ever gets her safe away."

With tears of sympathy shining on her

cheeks, and both hands stretched out to the poor soul who implored this small boon of her, Christie promised all the help that in her lay, and kept her word religiously.

From that time Hepsey's cause was hers; she laid by a part of her wages for "ole mammy;" she comforted Hepsey with happy prophecies of success, and taught with an energy and skill she had never known before. Novels lost their charms now, for Hepsey could give her a comedy and tragedy surpassing anything she found in them, because truth stamped her tales with a power and pathos the most gifted fancy could but poorly imitate.

The select receptions up-stairs seemed duller than ever to her now, and her happiest evenings were spent in the tidy kitchen watching Hepsey laboriously shaping A's and B's, or counting up on her worn fingers the wages they had earned by months of weary work, that she might purchase one treasure —a feeble old woman worn out with seventy years of slavery far away there in Virginia.

For a year Christie was a faithful servant

to her mistress, who appreciated her virtues but did not encourage them; a true friend to poor Hepsey, who loved her dearly and found in her sympathy and affection a solace for many griefs and wrongs. But Providence had other lessons for Christie, and when this one was well learned she was sent away to learn another phase of woman's life and labour.

While their domestics amused themselves with privy conspiracy and rebellion at home Mr. and Mrs. Stuart spent their evenings in chasing that bright bubble called social success, and usually came home rather cross because they could not catch it.

On one of these occasions they received a warm welcome, for as they approached the house smoke was seen issuing from an attic window and flames flickering behind the half-drawn curtain. Bursting out of the carriage with his usual impetuosity, Mr. Stuart let himself in and tore up-stairs, shouting "Fire!" like an engine company.

In the attic Christie was discovered lying dressed upon her bed, asleep or suffocated by

the smoke that filled the room. A book had slipped from her hand, and in falling had upset the candle on a chair beside her; the long wick leaned against a cotton gown hanging on the wall, and a greater part of Christie's wardrobe was burning brilliantly.

"I forbade her to keep the gas lighted so late, and see what the deceitful creature has done with her private candle!" cried Mrs. Stuart with a shrillness that roused the girl from her heavy sleep more effectually than the anathemas Mr. Stuart was fulminating against the fire.

Sitting up, she looked dizzily about her. The smoke was clearing fast, a window having been opened; and the tableau was a striking one. Mr. Stuart, with an excited countenance, was dancing frantically on a heap of half-consumed clothes pulled from the wall. He had not only drenched them with water from bowl and pitcher, but had also cast those articles upon the pile, like extinguishers, and was skipping among the fragments with an agility which contrasted with his stout figure in full evening costume, and his

besmirched face made the sight irresistibly ludicrous.

Mrs. Stuart, though in her most regal array, seemed to have left her dignity downstairs, with her opera cloak, for, with skirts gathered closely about her, tiara all askew, and face full of fear and anger, she stood upon a chair and scolded like any shrew.

The comic overpowered the tragic, and, being a little hysterical with the sudden alarm, Christie broke into a peal of laughter that sealed her fate.

"Look at her! look at her!" cried Mrs. Stuart, gesticulating on her perch as if about to fly. "She has been at the wine or lost her wits! She must go, Horatio, she must go! I cannot have my nerves shattered by such dreadful scenes. She is too fond of books, and it has turned her brain. Hepsey can watch her to-night, and at dawn she shall leave the house for ever."

"Not till after breakfast, my dear. Let us have that in comfort, I beg, for, upon my soul, we shall need it!" panted Mr. Stuart, sinking into a chair, exhausted with the

vigorous measures which had quenched the conflagration.

Christie checked her untimely mirth, explained the probable cause of the mischief, and penitently promised to be more careful for the future.

Mr. Stuart would have pardoned her on the spot, but madam was inexorable, for she had so completely forgotten her dignity that she felt it would be impossible ever to recover it in the eyes of this disrespectful menial. Therefore she dismissed her with a lecture that made both mistress and maid glad to part.

She did not appear at breakfast, and after that meal Mr. Stuart paid Christie her wages with a solemnity which proved that he had taken a curtain lecture to heart. There was a twinkle in his eye, however, as he kindly added a recommendation, and after the door closed behind him Christie was sure that he exploded into a laugh at the recollection of his last night's performance.

This lightened her sense of disgrace very much; so, leaving a part of her money to repair

damages, she packed up her dilapidated wardrobe, and, making Hepsey promise to report progress from time to time, Christie went back to Mrs. Flint's, to compose her mind and be ready *à la* Micawber "for another spring."

CHAPTER III.

ACTRESS.

FEELING that she had all the world before her where to choose, and that her next step ought to take her up at least one round higher on the ladder she was climbing, Christie decided not to try going out to service again. She knew very well that she would never live with Irish mates, and could not expect to find another Hepsey. So she tried to get a place as companion to an invalid, but failed to secure the only situation of the sort that was offered her, because she mildly objected to waiting on a nervous cripple all day, and reading aloud half the night. The old lady called her an "impertinent baggage," and Christie retired in great disgust, resolving not to be a slave to anybody.

Things seldom turn out as we plan them, and after much waiting and hoping for other work, Christie at last accepted about the only employment which had not entered her mind.

Among the boarders at Mrs. Flint's were an old lady and her pretty daughter, both actresses at a respectable theatre. Not stars by any means, but good, second-rate players, doing their work creditably, and earning an honest living. The mother had been kind to Christie in offering advice, and sympathizing with her disappointments. The daughter, a gay little lass, had taken Christie to the theatre several times, there to behold her in all the gauzy glories that surround the nymphs of spectacular romance.

To Christie this was a great delight, for, though she had poured over her father's Shakspeare till she knew many scenes by heart, she had never seen a play till Lucy led her into what seemed an enchanted world. Her interest and admiration pleased the little actress, and sundry lifts when she was hurried with her dresses made her grateful to Christie.

The girl's despondent face as she came in day after day from her unsuccessful quest told its own story, though she uttered no complaint, and these friendly souls laid their heads together, eager to help her in their own dramatic fashion.

"I've got it! I've got it! All hail to the queen!" was the cry that one day startled Christie as she sat thinking anxiously, while sewing mock-pearls on a crown for Mrs. Black.

Looking up, she saw Lucy just home from rehearsal, going through a series of pantomimic evolutions suggestive of a warrior doing battle with incredible valour and a very limited knowledge of the noble art of self-defence.

"What have you got? Who is the queen?" she asked, laughing as the breathless hero lowered her umbrella, and laid her bonnet at Christie's feet.

"*You* are to be the Queen of the Amazons in our new spectacle, at half a dollar a night for six or eight weeks, if the piece goes well."

"No!" cried Christie, with a gasp.

"Yes!" cried Lucy, clapping her hands: and then she proceeded to tell her news with theatrical volubility. "Mr. Sharp, the manager, wants a lot of tallish girls, and I told him I knew of a perfect dear. He said, 'Bring her on, then,' and I flew home to tell you. Now, don't look wild, and say no. You've only got to sing in one chorus, march in the grand procession, and lead your band in the terrific battle-scene. The dress is splendid! Red tunic, tiger-skin over shoulder, helmet, shield, lance, fleshings, sandals, hair down, and as much cork to your eyebrows as you like."

Christie certainly did look wild, for Lucy had burst into the room like a small hurricane, and her rapid words rattled about the listeners' ears as if a hail-storm had followed the gust. While Christie still sat with her mouth open, too bewildered to reply, Mrs. Black said, in her cosey voice,—

"Try it, me dear, it's just what you'll enjoy, and a capital beginning, I assure ye; for if you do well, old Sharp will want you

again, and then, when some one slips out of the company you can slip in, and there you are quite comfortable. Try it, me dear, and if you don't like it, drop it when the piece is over, and there's no harm done."

"It's much easier and jollier than any of the things you are after. We'll stand by you like bricks, and in a week you'll say it's the best lark you ever had in your life. Don't be prim now, but say yes, like a trump as you are," added Lucy, waving a pink satin train temptingly before her friend.

"I will try it," said Christie, with sudden decision, feeling that something entirely new and absorbing was what she needed to expend the vigour, romance, and enthusiasm of her youth upon.

With a shriek of delight Lucy swept her off her chair, and twirled her about the room as excitable young ladies are fond of doing when their joyful emotions need a vent. When both were giddy they subsided into a corner and a breathless discussion of the important step.

Though she had consented, Christie had

endless doubts and fears, but Lucy removed many of the former, and her own desire for pleasant employment conquered many of the latter. In her most despairing moods she had never thought of trying this. Uncle Enos considered "play actin'" as the sum of all iniquity. What would he say if she went calmly to destruction by that road? Sad to relate, this recollection rather strengthened her purpose, for a delicious sense of freedom pervaded her soul, and the old defiant spirit seemed to rise up within her at the memory of her uncle's grim prophecies and narrow views.

"Lucy is happy, virtuous, and independent; why can't I be so too if I have any talent? It isn't exactly what I should choose, but anything honest is better than idleness. I'll try it any way, and get a little fun, even if I don't make much money or glory out of it."

So Christie held to her resolution in spite of many secret misgivings, and followed Mrs. Black's advice on all points with a docility which caused that sanguine lady to predict

that she would be a star before she knew where she was.

"Is this the stage? How dusty and dull it looks by daylight!" said Christie next day, as she stood by Lucy on the very spot where she had seen Hamlet die in great anguish two nights before.

"Bless you, it's in curl-papers now, as I am of a morning. Mr. Sharp, here's an Amazon for you."

As she spoke, Lucy hurried across the stage, followed by Christie, wearing anything but an Amazonian expression just then.

"Ever on before?" abruptly asked a keen-faced little man, glancing with an experienced eye at the young person who stood before him bathed in blushes.

"No, sir."

"Do you sing?"

"A little, sir."

"Dance, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"Just take a turn across the stage, will you? Must walk well to lead a march."

As she went, Christie heard Mr. Sharp taking notes audibly :—

"Good tread; capital figure; fine eye. She'll make up well, and behave herself, I fancy."

A strong desire to make off seized the girl; but remembering that she had presented herself for inspection, she controlled the impulse, and returned to him with no demonstration of displeasure, but a little more fire in "the fine eye," and a more erect carriage of the "capital figure."

"All right, my dear. Give your name to Mr. Tripp, and your mind to the business, and consider yourself engaged,"—with which satisfactory remark the little man vanished like a ghost.

"Lucy, did you hear that impertinent 'my dear'?" asked Christie, whose sense of propriety had received its first shock.

"Lord, child, all managers do it. They don't mean anything; so be resigned, and thank your stars he didn't say 'love' and 'darling,' and kiss you, as old Vining used to," was all the sympathy she got.

Having obeyed orders, Lucy initiated her into the mysteries of the place, and then put her in a corner, to look over the scenes in which she was to appear. Christie soon caught the idea of her part—not a difficult matter, as there were but few ideas in the whole piece, after which she sat watching the arrival of the troop she was to lead; a most forlorn band of warriors they seemed, huddled together, and looking as if afraid to speak, lest they should infringe some rule, or to move, lest they should be swallowed up by some unsuspected trap-door.

Presently the ballet-master appeared, the orchestra struck up, and Christie found herself marching and counter-marching at word of command. At first a most uncomfortable sense of the absurdity of her position oppressed and confused her; then the ludicrous contrast between the solemn anxiety of the troop and the fantastic evolutions they were performing amused her till the novelty wore off; the martial music excited her; the desire to please sharpened her wits; and natural grace made it easy for her to catch

and copy the steps and poses given her to imitate. Soon she forgot herself, entered into the spirit of the thing, and exerted every sense to please so successfully, that Mr. Tripp praised her quickness at comprehension, Lucy applauded heartily from a fairy car, and Mr. Sharp popped his head out of a palace window to watch the Amazon's descent from the Mountains of the Moon.

When the regular company arrived the troop was dismissed till the progress of the play demanded their reappearance. Much interested in the piece, Christie stood aside under a palm-tree, the foliage of which was strongly suggestive of a dilapidated green umbrella, enjoying the novel sights and sounds about her.

Yellow-faced gentlemen and sleepy-eyed ladies roamed languidly about with much incoherent jabbering of parts, and frequent explosions of laughter. Princes, with varnished boots and suppressed cigars, fought, bled, and died, without a change of countenance. Damsels of unparalleled beauty,

according to the text, gaped in the faces of adoring lovers, and crocheted serenely on the brink of annihilation. Fairies, in rubber boots and woollen head-gear, disported themselves on flowery banks of canvas, or were suspended aloft with hooks in their backs like young Hindoo devotees. Demons, guiltless of hoof or horn, clutched their victims with the inevitable "Ha! ha!" and vanished darkly, eating pea-nuts. The ubiquitous Mr. Sharp seemed to pervade the whole theatre, for his voice came shrilly from above or spectrally from below, and his active little figure darted to and fro, like a critical will-o'-the-wisp.

The grand march and chorus in the closing scene were easily accomplished; for, as Lucy bade her, Christie "sang with all her might," and kept step as she led her band with the dignity of a Boadicea. No one spoke to her; few observed her; all were intent on their own affairs; and when the final shriek and bang died away without lifting the roof by its din, she could hardly believe that the dreaded first rehearsal was safely over.

A visit to the wardrobe-room, to see her dress, came next; and here Christie had a slight skirmish with the mistress of that department relative to the length of her classical garments. As studies from the nude had not yet become one of the amusements of the *élite* of Little Babel, Christie was not required to appear in the severe simplicity of a costume consisting of a necklace, sandals, and a bit of gold fringe about the waist, but was allowed an extra inch or two on her tunic, and departed, much comforted by the assurance that her dress would not be "a shock to modesty," as Lucy expressed it.

"Now look at yourself, and, for my sake, prove an honour to your country and a terror to the foe," said Lucy, as she led her protégée before the green-room mirror on the first night of "The Demon's Daughter; or, the Castle of the Sun!! The most magnificent spectacle ever produced upon the American stage!!!"

Christie looked, and saw a warlike figure, with glittering helmet, shield and lance,

streaming hair, and savage cloak. She liked the picture, for there was much of the heroic spirit in the girl, and even this poor counterfeit pleased her eye and filled her fancy with martial memories of Joan of Arc, Zenobia, and Britomarte.

"Go to!" cried Lucy, who affected theatrical modes of speech. "Don't admire yourself any longer, but tie up your sandals and come on. Be sure you rush down the instant I cry, 'Demon, I defy thee!' Don't break your neck, or pick your way like a cat in wet weather, but come *with effect*, for I want that scene to make a hit."

Princess Caremfil swept away, and the Amazonian queen climbed to her perch among the painted mountains, where her troop already sat like a flock of pigeons shining in the sun. The gilded breast-plate rose and fell with the quick beating of her heart, the spear shook with the trembling of her hand, her lips were dry, her head dizzy, and more than once, as she waited for her cue, she was sorely tempted to run away and take the consequences.

But the thought of Lucy's good-will and

confidence kept her, and when the cry came she answered with a ringing shout, rushed down the ten-foot precipice, and charged upon the foe with an energy that inspired her followers, and quite satisfied the princess struggling in the demon's grasp.

With clashing of arms and shrill war-cries the rescuers of innocence assailed the sooty fiends, who fell before their unscientific blows with a rapidity which inspired in the minds of beholders a suspicion that the goblins' own voluminous tails tripped them up and gallantry kept them prostrate. As the last groan expired, the last agonized squirm subsided, the conquerors performed the intricate dance with which it appears the Amazons were wont to celebrate their victories. Then the scene closed with a glare of red light and a "grand tableau" of the martial queen standing in a bower of lances, the rescued princess gracefully fainting in her arms, and the vanquished demon scowling fiercely under her foot, while four-and-twenty dishevelled damsels sang a song of exultation to the barbaric music of a tattoo on their shields.

All went well that night, and when at last

the girls doffed crown and helmet, they confided to one another the firm opinion that the success of the piece was in a great measure owing to their talent and their exertions, and went gaily home, predicting for themselves careers as brilliant as those of Siddons and Rachel.

It would be a pleasant task to paint the vicissitudes and victories of a successful actress; but Christie was no dramatic genius born to shine before the world and leave a name behind her. She had no talent except that which may be developed in any girl possessing the lively fancy, sympathetic nature, and ambitious spirit which make such girls naturally dramatic. This was to be only one of many experiences which were to show her her own weakness, and through effort, pain, and disappointment fit her to play a nobler part on a wider stage.

For a few weeks Christie's illusions lasted; then she discovered that the new life was nearly as humdrum as the old, that her companions were ordinary men and women, and her bright hopes were growing as dim as her

tarnished shield. She grew unutterably weary of "The Castle of the Sun," and found "The Demon's Daughter" an unmitigated bore. She was not tired of the profession, only dissatisfied with the place she held in it, and eager to attempt a part that gave some scope for power and passion.

Mrs. Black wisely reminded her that she must learn to use her wings before she tried to fly, and comforted her with stories of celebrities who had begun as she was beginning, yet who had suddenly burst from their grub-like obscurity, to adorn the world as splendid butterflies.

"We'll stand by you, Kit; so keep up your courage, and do your best. Be clever to every one in general, old Sharp in particular, and when a chance comes, have your wits about you and grab it. That's the way to get on," said Lucy, as sagely as if she had been a star for years.

"If I had beauty I should stand a better chance," sighed Christie, surveying herself with great disfavour, quite unconscious that to a cultivated eye the soul of beauty was

often visible in that face of hers, with its intelligent eyes, sensitive mouth, and fine lines about the forehead, making it a far more significant and attractive countenance than that of her friend, possessing only piquant prettiness.

"Never mind, child; you've got a lovely figure, and an actress's best feature—fine eyes and eyebrows. I heard old Kent say so, and he's a judge. So make the best of what you've got, as I do," answered Lucy, glancing at her own comely little person with an air of perfect resignation.

Christie laughed at the adviser, but wisely took the advice, and, though she fretted in private, was cheerful and alert in public. Always modest, attentive, and obliging, she soon became a favourite with her mates, and, thanks to Lucy's good offices with Mr. Sharp, whose favourite she was, Christie got promoted sooner than she otherwise would have been.

A great Christmas spectacle was brought out the next season, and Christie had a good part in it. When that was over she thought there was no hope for her, as the regular

company was full, and a different sort of performance was to begin. But just then her chance came, and she "grabbed it." The first *soubrette* died suddenly, and in the emergency Mr. Sharp offered the place to Christie till he could fill it to his mind. Lucy was second *soubrette*, and had hoped for this promotion; but Lucy did not sing well. Christie had a good voice, had taken lessons, and much improved of late, so she had the preference, and resolved to stand the test so well that this temporary elevation should become permanent.

She did her best, and though many of the parts were distasteful to her, she got through them successfully, while now and then she had one which she thoroughly enjoyed. Her Tilly Slowboy was a hit, and a proud girl was Christie when Kent, the comedian, congratulated her on it, and told her he had seldom seen it better done.

To find favour in Kent's eyes was an honour indeed, for he belonged to the old school, and rarely condescended to praise modern actors. His own style was so admir-

able that he was justly considered the first comedian in the country, and was the pride and mainstay of the old theatre where he had played for years. Of course he possessed much influence in that little world, and, being a kindly man, used it generously to help up any young aspirant who seemed to him deserving.

He had observed Christie, attracted by her intelligent face and modest manners, for in spite of her youth there was a native refinement about her that made it impossible for her to romp and flirt as some of her mates did. But till she played Tilly he had not thought she possessed any talent. That pleased him, and seeing how much she valued his praise, and was flattered by his notice, he gave her the wise but unpalatable advice always offered young actors. Finding that she accepted it, was willing to study hard, work faithfully, and wait patiently, he predicted that in time she would make a clever actress, never a great one.

Of course Christie thought he was mistaken, and secretly resolved to prove him a false

prophet by the triumph of her career. But she meekly bowed to his opinion; this docility pleased him, and he took a paternal sort of interest in her, which coming from the powerful favourite, did her good service with the higher powers, and helped her on more rapidly than years of meritorious effort.

Towards the end of the second season several of Dickens' dramatized novels were played, and Christie earned fresh laurels. She loved those books, and seemed by instinct to understand and personate the humour and pathos of many of those grotesque creations. Believing that she had little beauty to sacrifice, she dressed such parts to the life, and played them with a spirit and ease that surprised those who had considered her a dignified and rather dull young person.

"I'll tell you what it is, Sharp, that girl is going to make a capital character actress. When her parts suit, she forgets herself entirely and does devilish well. Her Miggs was nearly the death of me to-night. She's got that one gift, and it's a good one. You'd

better give her a chance, for I think she'll be a credit to the old concern."

Kent said that: Christie heard it, and flew to Lucy, waving Miggs' cap for joy as she told the news.

"What did Mr. Sharp say?" asked Lucy, turning round with her face half "made up."

"He merely said 'Hum,' and smiled. Wasn't that a good sign?" said Christie anxiously.

"Can't say," and Lucy touched up her eyebrows as if she took no interest in the affair.

Christie's face fell, and her heart sank at the thought of failure; but she kept up her spirits by working harder than ever, and soon had her reward. Mr. Sharp's "Hum" did mean yes, and the next season she was regularly engaged with a salary of thirty dollars a week.

It was a grand step, and knowing that she owed it to Kent, Christie did her utmost to show that she deserved his good opinion. New trials and temptations beset her now, but hard work and an innocent nature kept

her safe and busy. Obstacles only spurred her on to redoubled exertion, and whether she did well or ill, was praised or blamed, she found a never-failing excitement in her attempts to reach the standard of perfection she had set up for herself. Kent did not regret his patronage. Mr. Sharp was satisfied with the success of the experiment, and Christie soon became a favourite in a small way, because behind the actress the public always saw a woman who never "forgot the modesty of nature."

But as she grew prosperous in outward things Christie found herself burthened with a private cross that tried her very much. Lucy was no longer her friend; something had come between them, and a steadily-increasing coldness took the place of the confidence and affection which had once existed. Lucy was jealous, for Christie had passed her in the race. She knew she could not fill the place Christie had gained by favour, and now held by her own exertions, still she was bitterly envious, though ashamed to own it.

Christie tried to be just and gentle, to prove her gratitude to her best friend, and to show that her heart was unchanged. But she failed to win Lucy back, and felt herself injured by such unjust resentment. Mrs. Black took her daughter's part, and though they preserved the peace outwardly, the old friendliness was quite gone.

Hoping to forget this trouble in excitement, Christie gave herself entirely to her profession, finding it a satisfaction which for a time consoled her.

But gradually she underwent the sorrowful change which comes to strong natures when they wrong themselves through ignorance or wilfulness.

Pride and native integrity kept her from the worst temptations of such a life, but to the lesser ones she yielded, growing selfish, frivolous, and vain; intent on her own advancement, and careless by what means she reached it. She had no thought now beyond her art, no desire beyond the commendation of those whose opinion was serviceable, no care for any one but herself.

Her love of admiration grew by what it fed on, till the sound of applause became the sweetest music to her ear. She rose with this hope, lay down with this satisfaction, and month after month passed in this feverish life, with no wish to change it, but a growing appetite for its unsatisfactory delights, an ever-increasing forgetfulness of any higher aspiration than dramatic fame.

"Give me joy, Lucy, I'm to have a benefit next week! Everybody else has had one, and I've played for them all, so no one seemed to begrudge me my turn when dear old Kent proposed it," said Christie, coming in one night, still flushed and excited with the good news.

"What shall you have?" asked Lucy, trying to look pleased, and failing decidedly.

"'Masks and Faces.' I've always wanted to play Peg, and it has good parts for you and Kent, and St. George. I chose it for that reason, for I shall need all the help I can get to pull me through, I dare say."

The smile vanished entirely at this speech, and Christie was suddenly seized with a suspicion that Lucy was not only jealous of her as

an actress, but as a woman. St. George was a comely young actor, who usually played lovers' parts with Christie, and played them very well too, being possessed of much talent, and a gentleman. They had never thought of falling in love with each other, though St. George wooed and won Christie night after night in vaudeville and farce. But it was very easy to imagine that so much mock passion had a basis of truth, and Lucy evidently tormented herself with this belief.

"Why didn't you choose Juliet? St. George would do Romeo so well," said Lucy, with a sneer.

"No, that is beyond me. Kent says Shakspeare will never be my line, and I believe him. I should think you'd be satisfied with 'Masks and Faces,' for you know Mabel gets her husband safely back in the end," answered Christie, watching the effect of her words.

"As if I wanted the man! No, thank you, other people's leavings won't suit me," cried Lucy, tossing her head, though her face belied the words.

"Not even though he has 'heavenly eyes,' 'distracting legs,' and 'a melting voice'?" asked Christie maliciously, quoting Lucy's own rapturous speeches when the new actor came.

"Come, come, girls, don't quarrel. I won't 'ave it in me room. Lucy's tired to death, and it's not nice of you, Kitty, to come and crow over her in this way," said Mamma Black, coming to the rescue, for Lucy was in tears, and Christie looked dangerous.

"It's impossible to please you, so I'll say good night," and Christie went to her room with resentment burning hotly in her heart.

As she crossed the chamber her eye fell on her own figure reflected in the long glass, and with a sudden impulse she turned up the gas, wiped the rouge from her cheeks, pushed back her hair, and studied her own face intently for several moments. It was pale and jaded now, and all its freshness seemed gone; hard lines had come about the mouth, a feverish disquiet filled the eyes, and on the forehead seemed to lie the shadow of a discontent that saddened the whole face. If one could believe

the testimony of that countenance, things were not going well with Christie, and she owned it with a regretful sigh, as she asked herself, "Am I what I hoped I should be? No; and it is my fault. If three years of this life have made me this, what shall I be in ten? A fine actress, perhaps, but how good a woman?"

With gloomy eyes fixed on her altered face she stood for a moment struggling with herself. Then the hard look returned, and she spoke out defiantly, as if in answer to some warning voice within herself: "No one cares what I am, so why care myself? Why not go on and get as much fame as I can? Success gives me power if it cannot give me happiness, and I must have some reward for my hard work. Yes; a gay life and a short one, then out with the lights and down with the curtain!"

But, in spite of her reckless words, Christie sobbed herself to sleep that night like a child who knows it is astray, yet cannot see the right path or hear its mother's voice calling it home.

On the night of the benefit Lucy was in a most exasperating mood, Christie in a very indignant one, and as they entered their dressing-room they looked as if they might have played the Rival Queens with great effect. Lucy offered no help and Christie asked none, but, putting her vexation resolutely out of sight, fixed her mind on the task before her.

As the pleasant stir began all about her, actress-like she felt her spirits rise, her courage increase with every curl she fastened up, every gay garment she put on, and soon smiled approvingly at herself, for excitement lent her cheeks a better colour than rouge, her eyes shone with satisfaction, and her heart beat high with the resolve to make a hit or die.

Christie needed encouragement that night, and found it in the hearty welcome that greeted her, and the full house, which proved how kind a regard was entertained for her by many who knew her only by a fictitious name. She felt this deeply, and it helped her much, for she was vexed with many trials those before the footlights knew nothing of.

The other players were full of kindly in-

terest in her success, but Lucy took a naughty satisfaction in harrassing her by all the small slights and unanswerable provocations which one actress has it in her power to inflict upon another.

Christie was fretted almost beyond endurance, and retaliated by an ominous frown when her position allowed, threatening asides when a moment's by-play favoured their delivery, and angry protests whenever she met Lucy off the stage.

But, in spite of all annoyances, she had never played better in her life. She liked the part, and acted the warm-hearted, quick-witted, sharp-tongued Peg with a spirit and grace that surprised even those who knew her best. Especially good was she in the scenes with Triplet, for Kent played the part admirably, and cheered her on with many an encouraging look and word. Anxious to do honour to her patron and friend, she threw her whole heart into the work; in the scene where she comes like a good angel to the home of the poor playwright, she brought tears to the eyes of her audience; and when at her

command Triplet strikes up a jig to amuse the children, she "covered the buckle" in gallant style, dancing with all the frolic *abandon* of the Irish orange-girl, who for a moment forgot her grandeur and her grief.

That scene was her best, for it is full of those touches of nature that need very little art to make them effective, and when a great bouquet fell with a thump at Christie's feet, as she paused to bow her thanks for an encore, she felt that she had reached the height of earthly bliss.

In the studio scene Lucy seemed suddenly gifted with unsuspected skill; for when Mabel kneels to the picture, praying her rival to give her back her husband's heart, Christie was amazed to see real tears roll down Lucy's cheeks, and to hear real love and longing thrill her trembling words with sudden power and passion.

"That is not acting. She does love St. George, and thinks I mean to keep him from her. Poor dear! I'll tell her all about it to-night, and set her heart at rest," thought Christie: and when Peg left the frame, her

face expressed the genuine pity that she felt, and her voice was beautifully tender as she promised to restore the stolen treasure.

Lucy felt comforted without knowing why, and the piece went smoothly on to its last scene. Peg was just relinquishing the repentant husband to his forgiving wife with those brave words of hers, when a rending sound above their head made all look up and start back: all but Lucy, who stood bewildered. Christie's quick eye saw the impending danger, and with a sudden spring she caught her friend from it. It was only a second's work, but it cost her much; for, in the act, down crashed one of the mechanical contrivances used in a late spectacle, and in its fall stretched Christie stunned and senseless on the stage.

A swift uprising filled the house with tumult; a crowd of actors hurried forward, and the panic-stricken audience caught glimpses of poor Peg lying mute and pallid in Mabel's arms, while Vane wrung his hands, and Triplet audibly demanded, "Why the devil somebody didn't go for a doctor?"

Then a brilliant view of Mount Parnassus, with Apollo and the Nine Muses in full blast, shut the scene from sight, and soon Mr. Sharp appeared, to ask their patience till the after-piece was ready, for Miss Douglas was too much injured to appear again. And, with an unwonted expression of feeling, the little man alluded to "the generous act which perhaps had changed the comedy to a tragedy, and robbed the beneficiary of her well-earned reward at their hands."

All had seen the impulsive spring towards, not from, the danger, and this unpremeditated action won heartier applause than Christie ever had received for her best rendering of more heroic deeds.

But she did not hear the cordial round they gave her. She had said she would "make a hit or die;" and just then it seemed as if she had done both, for she was deaf and blind to the admiration and the sympathy bestowed upon her as the curtain fell on the first and last benefit she ever was to have.

CHAPTER IV.

GOVERNESS.

DURING the next few weeks Christie learned the worth of many things which she had valued very lightly until then. Health became a boon too precious to be trifled with; life assumed a deeper significance when death's shadow fell upon its light; and she discovered that dependence might be made endurable by the sympathy of unsuspected friends.

Lucy waited upon her with a remorseful devotion which touched her very much, and won entire forgiveness for the past, long before it was repentantly implored. All her comrades came with offers of help and affectionate regrets. Several whom she had most disliked now earned her gratitude by the kindly thoughtfulness which filled her sick-room

with fruit and flowers, supplied carriages for the convalescent, and paid her doctor's bill without her knowledge.

Thus Christie learned, like many another needy member of the gay profession, that though often extravagant and jovial in their way of life, these men and women give as freely as they spend, wear warm, true hearts under their motley, and make misfortune only another link in the bond of good-fellowship which binds them loyally together.

Slowly Christie gathered her energies after weeks of suffering, and took up her life again, grateful for the gift, and anxious to be more worthy of it. Looking back upon the past, she felt that she had made a mistake and lost more than she had gained in those three years. Others might lead that life of alternate excitement and hard work unharmed, but she could not. The very ardour and insight which gave power to the actress made that mimic life unsatisfactory to the woman, for hers was an earnest nature, that took fast hold of whatever task she gave herself to do, and lived in it heartily while duty made it right, or novelty

lent it charms. But when she saw the error of a step, the emptiness of belief, with a like earnestness she tried to retrieve the one and to replace the other with a better substitute.

In the silence of wakeful nights and the solitude of quiet days, she took counsel with her better self, condemned the reckless spirit which had possessed her, and came at last to the decision which conscience prompted and much thought confirmed.

"The stage is not the place for me," she said. "I have no genius to glorify the drudgery, keep me from temptation, and repay me for any sacrifice I make. Other women can lead this life safely and happily; I cannot, and I must *not* go back to it, because, with all my past experience, and in spite of all my present good resolutions, I should do no better, and I might do worse. I'm not wise enough to keep steady there; I must return to the old ways, dull but safe, and plod along till I find my real place and work."

Great was the surprise of Lucy and her mother when Christie told her resolution, adding in a whisper to the girl, "I leave the

field clear for you, dear, and will dance at your wedding with all my heart when St. George asks you to play the 'Honeymoon' with him, as I'm sure he will before long."

Many entreaties from friends, as well as secret longings, tried and tempted Christie sorely; but she withstood them all, carried her point, and renounced the profession she could not follow without self-injury and self-reproach. The season was nearly over when she was well enough to take her place again, but she refused to return, relinquished her salary, sold her wardrobe, and never crossed the threshold of the theatre after she had said good-bye.

Then she asked, "What next?" and was speedily answered. An advertisement for a governess met her eye, which seemed to combine the two things she most needed just then —employment and change of air.

"Mind you don't mention that you've been an actress, or it will be all up with you, me dear," said Mrs. Black, as Christie prepared to investigate the matter, for since her last effort in that line she had increased her

knowledge of music, and learned French enough to venture teaching it to very young pupils.

"I'd rather tell in the beginning, for if you keep anything back it's sure to pop out when you least expect or want it. I don't believe these people will care as long as I am respectable and teach well," returned Christie, wishing she looked stronger and rosier.

"You'll be sorry if you do tell," warned Mrs. Black, who knew the ways of the world.

"I shall be sorry if I don't," laughed Christie, and so she was in the end.

"L. N. Saltonstall" was the name on the door, and L. N. Saltonstall's servant was so leisurely about answering Christie's meek solo on the bell, that she had time to pull out her bonnet-strings half-a-dozen times before a very black man, in a very white jacket, condescended to conduct her to his mistress.

A frail, tea-coloured lady appeared, displaying such a small proportion of woman to such a large proportion of purple and fine

linen that she looked as if she was literally as well as figuratively "dressed to death."

Christie went to the point in a business-like manner that seemed to suit Mrs. Saltonstall, because it saved so much trouble, and she replied with a languid affability,—

"I wish some one to teach the children a little, for they are getting too old to be left entirely to nurse. I am anxious to get to the sea-shore as soon as possible, for they have been poorly all winter, and my own health has suffered. Do you feel inclined to try the place? And what compensation do you require?"

Christie had but a vague idea of what wages were usually paid to nursery governesses, and hesitatingly named a sum which seemed reasonable to her, but was so much less than any other applicant had asked, that Mrs. Saltonstall began to think she could not do better than secure this cheap young person, who looked firm enough to manage her rebellious son and heir, and well-bred enough to begin the education of a little fine lady. Her winter had been an extravagant one, and

she could economize in the governess better perhaps than elsewhere; so she decided to try Christie, and get out of town at once.

"Your terms are quite satisfactory, Miss Devon, and if my brother approves, I think we will consider the matter settled. Perhaps you would like to see the children? They are little darlings, and you will soon be fond of them, I am sure."

A bell was rung, an order given, and presently appeared an eight-year-old boy, so excessively Scotch in his costume that he looked like an animated checker-board, and a little girl who presented the appearance of a miniature opera-dancer staggering under the weight of an immense sash.

"Go and speak prettily to Miss Devon, my pets, for she is coming to play with you, and you must mind what she says," commanded mamma.

The pale, fretful-looking little pair went solemnly to Christie's knee, and stood there, staring at her with a dull composure that quite daunted her, it was so sadly unchild-like.

"What is your name, dear?" she asked, laying her hand on the young lady's head.

"Villamena Temmatina Taltentall. You mustn't touch my hair; it's just turled," was the somewhat embarrassing reply.

"Mine's Louy 'Poleon Thaltensthall, like papa's," volunteered the other young person, and Christie privately wondered if the possession of names nearly as long as themselves was not a burden to the poor dears.

Feeling that she must say something, she asked, in her most persuasive tone,—

"Would you like to have me come and teach you some nice lessons out of your little books?"

If she had proposed corporal punishment on the spot it could not have caused greater dismay. Wilhelmina cast herself upon the floor passionately, declaring that she "touldn't tuddy," and Saltonstall, Junr., retreated precipitately to the door, and from that refuge defied the whole race of governesses and "nasty lessons" jointly.

"There, run away to Justine. They are sadly out of sorts, and quite pining for sea

air," said mamma, with both hands at her ears, for the war-cries of her darlings were piercing as they departed, proclaiming their wrongs while swarming up-stairs with a skirmish on each landing.

With a few more words Christie took leave, and scandalized the sable retainer by smiling all through the hall, and laughing audibly as the door closed. The contrast of the plaid boy and beruffled girl's irritability with their mother's languid affectation, and her own unfortunate efforts, was too much for her. In the middle of her merriment she paused suddenly, saying to herself,—

"I never told about my acting. I must go back and have it settled." She retraced a few steps, then turned and went on again, thinking, "No; for once I'll be guided by other people's advice, and let well alone."

A note arrived soon after, bidding Miss Devon consider herself engaged, and desiring her to join the family at the boat on Monday next.

At the appointed time Christie was on

board, and looked about for her party. Mrs. Saltonstall appeared in the distance with her family about her, and Christie took a survey before reporting herself. Madam looked more like a fashion-plate than ever, in a mass of green flounces, and an impressive bonnet flushed with poppies and bristling with wheat-ears.

Beside her sat a gentleman, rapt in a newspaper, of course, for to an American man life is a burden till the daily news have been absorbed. Mrs. Saltonstall's brother was the possessor of a handsome eye without softness, thin lips without benevolence, but plenty of will; a face and figure which thirty-five years of ease and pleasure had done their best to polish and spoil, and a costume without flaw, from his aristocratic boots to the summer hat on his head.

The little boy more checkered and the little girl more operatic than before, sat on stools eating bonbons, while a French maid and the African footman hovered in the background.

Feeling very much like a meek grey moth

among a flock of butterflies, Christie modestly presented herself.

"Good morning," said Madam, with a nod, which, slight as it was, caused a great commotion among the poppies and the wheat; "I began to be anxious about you. Miss Devon, my brother, Mr. Fletcher."

"The gentleman bowed, and as Christie sat down he got up, saying, as he sauntered away, with a bored expression,—

"Will you have the paper, Charlotte? There's nothing in it."

As Mrs. Saltonstall seemed going to sleep, and she felt delicate about addressing the irritable infants in public, Christie amused herself by watching Mr. Fletcher as he roamed listlessly about, and deciding, in her usual rash way, that she did not like him because he looked both lazy and cross, and ennui was evidently his bosom friend. Soon, however, she forgot everything but the shimmer of the sunshine on the sea, the fresh wind that brought colour to her pale cheeks, and the happy thoughts that left a smile upon her lips. Then Mr. Fletcher put up his glass

and stared at her, shook his head, and said, as he lit a cigar,—

"Poor little wretch, what a time she will have of it between Charlotte and the brats!"

But Christie needed no pity, and thought herself a fortunate young woman when fairly established in her corner of the luxurious apartments occupied by the family. Her duties seemed light compared to those she had left, her dreams were almost as bright as of old, and the new life looked pleasant to her, for she was one of those who could find little bits of happiness for herself and enjoy them heartily in spite of loneliness or neglect.

One of her amusements was studying her companions, and for a time this occupied her, for Christie possessed penetration and a feminine fancy for finding out people.

Mrs. Saltonstall's mission appeared to be the illustration of each new fashion as it came, and she performed it with a devotion worthy of a better cause. If a colour reigned supreme she flushed herself with scarlet or faded into primrose, made herself pretty in

the bluest of blue gowns, or turned livid under a gooseberry-coloured bonnet. Her hat-brims went up or down, were preposterously wide or dwindled to an inch, as the mode demanded. Her skirts were rampant with sixteen frills, or picturesque with landscapes down each side, and a Greek border or a plain hem. Her waists were as pointed as those of Queen Bess, or as short as Diana's; and it was the opinion of those who knew her that if the autocrat who ruled her life decreed the wearing of black cats as well as of vegetables, bugs, and birds, the blackest, gloomiest puss procurable for money would have adorned her head in some way.

Her time was spent in dressing, driving, dining, and dancing; in skimming novels, and embroidering muslin; going to church with a velvet prayer-book and a new bonnet, and writing to her husband when she wanted money, for she had a husband somewhere abroad, who so happily combined business with pleasure that he never found time to come home. Her children were inconvenient

blessings, but she loved them with a love of a shallow heart, and took such good care of their little bodies that there was none left for their little souls. A few days' trial satisfied her as to Christie's capabilities, and, relieved of that anxiety, she gave herself up to her social duties, leaving the ocean and the governess to make the summer wholesome and agreeable to "the darlings."

Mr. Fletcher, having tried all sorts of pleasure and found that, like his newspaper, there was "nothing in it," was now paying the penalty for that unsatisfactory knowledge. Ill-health soured his temper and made his life a burden to him. Having few resources within himself to fall back upon, he was very dependent upon other people, and other people were so busy amusing themselves, they seemed to find little time or inclination to amuse a man who had never troubled himself about them. He was rich, but while his money could hire a servant to supply each want, gratify each caprice, it could not buy a tender, faithful friend to serve for love, and ask no wages but his comfort.

He knew this, and felt the vain regret that inevitably comes to those who waste life and learn the value of good gifts by their loss. But he was not wise or brave enough to bear his punishment manfully, and lay the lesson honestly to heart. Fretful and imperious when in pain, listless and selfish when at ease, his one aim in life now was to kill time, and anything that aided him in this was most gratefully welcomed.

For a long while he took no more notice of Christie than if she had been a shadow, seldom speaking beyond the necessary salutations, and merely carrying his finger to his hat-brim when he passed her on the beach with the children. Her first dislike was softened by pity when she found he was an invalid, but she troubled herself very little about him, and made no romances with him, for all her dreams were of younger, nobler lovers.

Busied with her own affairs, the days though monotonous were not unhappy. She prospered in her work, and the children soon believed in her as devoutly as young Turks

in their Prophet. She devised amusements for herself as well as for them; walked, bathed, drove, and romped with the little people till her own eyes shone like theirs, her cheek grew rosy, and her thin figure rounded with the promise of vigorous health again.

Christie was at her best that summer, physically speaking, for sickness had refined her face, giving it that indescribable expression which pain often leaves upon a countenance as if in compensation for the bloom it takes away. The frank eyes had a softer shadow in their depths, the firm lips smiled less often, but when it came the smile was the sweeter for the gravity that went before, and in her voice there was a new undertone of that subtle music, called sympathy, which steals into the heart and nestles there.

She was unconscious of this gracious change, but others saw and felt it, and to some a face bright with health, intelligence and modesty was more attractive than mere beauty. Thanks to this and her quiet, cordial manners, she found friends here and

there to add charms to that summer by the sea.

The dashing young men took no more notice of her than if she had been a little grey peep on the sands; not so much, for they shot peeps now and then, but a governess was not worth bringing down. The fashionable belles and beauties were not even aware of her existence, being too entirely absorbed in their yearly husband-hunt to think of any one but themselves and their prey. The dowagers had more interesting topics to discuss, and found nothing in Christie's humble fortunes worthy of a thought, for they liked their gossip strong and highly flavoured, like their tea.

But a kind-hearted girl or two found her out, several lively old maids, as full of the romance of the past as ancient novels, a bashful boy, three or four invalids, and all the children, for Christie had a motherly heart, and could find charms in the plainest, crossest baby that ever squalled.

Of her old friends she saw nothing, as her theatrical ones were off on their vacations,

Hepsey had left her place for one in another city, and Aunt Betsey seldom wrote.

But one day a letter came, telling her that the dear old lady would never write again, and Christie felt as if her nearest and dearest friend was lost. She had gone away to a quiet spot among the rocks, to get over her first grief alone, but found it very hard to check her tears, as memory brought back the past, tenderly recalling every kind act, every loving word, and familiar scene. She seldom wept, but when anything did unseal the fountains that lay so deep, she cried with all her heart, and felt the better for it.

With the letter crumpled in her hand, her head on her knees, and her hat at her feet, she was sobbing like a child, when steps startled her, and, looking up, she saw Mr. Fletcher regarding her with an astonished countenance from under his big sun umbrella.

Something in the flushed, wet face, with its tremulous lips and great tears rolling down, seemed to touch even lazy Mr. Fletcher, for he furled his umbrella with unusual rapidity, and came up, saying anxiously,—

"My dear Miss Devon, what's the matter? Are you hurt? Has Mrs. S. been scolding? Or have the children been too much for you?"

"No, oh no! it's bad news from home," and Christie's head went down again, for a kind word was more than she could bear just then.

"Some one ill, I fancy? I'm sorry to hear it, but you must hope for the best, you know," replied Mr. Fletcher, really quite exerting himself to remember and present this well-worn consolation.

"There is no hope; Aunt Betsey's dead!"

"Dear me! that's very sad."

Mr. Fletcher tried not to smile as Christie sobbed out the old-fashioned name, but a minute afterward there were actually tears in his eyes, for, as if won by his sympathy, she poured out the homely little story of Aunt Betsey's life and love, unconsciously pronouncing the kind old lady's best epitaph in the unaffected grief that made her broken words so eloquent.

For a minute Mr. Fletcher forgot himself, and felt as he remembered feeling long ago,

when, a warm-hearted boy, he had comforted his sister for a lost kitten or a broken doll. It was a new sensation, therefore, interesting and agreeable while it lasted, and when it vanished, which it speedily did, he sighed, then shrugged his shoulders and wished "the girl would stop crying like a water-spout."

"It's hard, but we all have to bear it, you know; and sometimes I fancy if half the pity we give the dead, who don't need it, was given to the living, who do, they'd bear their troubles more comfortably. I know *I* should," added Mr. Fletcher, returning to his own afflictions, and vaguely wondering if any one would cry like that when he departed this life.

Christie minded little what he said, for his voice was pitiful, and it comforted her. She dried her tears, put back her hair, and thanked him with a grateful smile, which gave him another pleasant sensation; for though young ladies showered smiles upon him with midsummer radiance, they seemed cool and pale beside the sweet sincerity of this one

given by a girl whose eyes were red with tender tears.

"That's right, cheer up, take a little run on the beach, and forget all about it," he said, with a heartiness that surprised himself as much as it did Christie.

"I will, thank you. Please don't speak of this; I'm used to bearing my troubles alone, and time will help me to do it cheerfully."

"That's brave! If I can do anything, let me know; I shall be most happy." And Mr. Fletcher evidently meant what he said.

Christie gave him another grateful "Thank you," then picked up her hat and went away along the sands to try his prescription, while Mr. Fletcher walked the other way, so wrapt in thought that he forgot to put up his umbrella till the end of his aristocratic nose was burnt a deep red.

That was the beginning of it, for when Mr. Fletcher found a new amusement, he usually pursued it regardless of consequences. Christie took his pity for what it was worth, and thought no more of that little interview, for her heart was very heavy. But he

remembered it, and, when they met on the beach next day, wondered how the governess would behave. She was reading as she walked, and, with a mute acknowledgment of his nod, tranquilly turned a page and read on without a pause, a smile, or change of colour.

Mr. Fletcher laughed as he strolled away; but Christie was all the more amusing for her want of coquetry, and soon after he tried her again. The great hotel was all astir one evening with bustle, light, and music, for the young people had a hop, as an appropriate entertainment for a melting July night. With no taste for such folly, even if health had not forbidden it, Mr. Fletcher lounged about the piazzas, tantalizing the fair fowlers who spread their nets for him, and goading sundry desperate spinsters to despair by his erratic movements. Coming to a quiet nook where a long window gave a fine view of the brilliant scene, he found Christie leaning in, with a bright, wistful face, while her hand kept time to the enchanting music of a waltz.

"Wisely watching the lunatics, instead of

joining in their antics," he said, sitting down with a sigh.

Christie looked around and answered, with the wistful look still in her eyes,—

"I'm very fond of that sort of insanity; but there is no place for me in Bedlam at present."

"I daresay I can find you one, if you care to try it, I don't indulge myself." And Mr. Fletcher's eye went from the rose in Christie's brown hair to the silvery folds of her best gown, put on merely for the pleasure of wearing it because every one else was in festival array.

She shook her head. "No, thank you. Governesses are very kindly treated in America; but ball-rooms like that are not for them. I enjoy looking on, fortunately; so I have my share of the fun after all."

"I shan't get any complaints out of her. Plucky little soul! I rather like that," said Mr. Fletcher to himself; and finding his seat comfortable, the corner cool, and his companion pleasant to look at, with the moon-

light doing its best for her, he went on talking for his own satisfaction.

Christie would rather have been left in peace; but fancying that he did it out of kindness to her, and that she had done him injustice before, she was grateful now, and exerted herself to seem so; in which endeavour she succeeded so well that Mr. Fletcher proved he could be a very agreeable companion when he chose. He talked well; and Christie was a good listener. Soon interest conquered her reserve, and she ventured to ask a question, make a criticism, or express an opinion in her own simple way. Unconsciously she piqued the curiosity of the man; for though he knew many lovely, wise, and witty women, he had never chanced to meet with one like this before—and novelty was the desire of his life. Of course he did not find moonlight, music, and agreeable chat as delightful as she did: but there *was* something animating in the fresh face opposite, something flattering in the eager interest she showed, and something most attractive in the glimpses unconsciously given him of a nature

genuine in its womanly sincerity and strength. Something about this girl seemed to appeal to the old self, so long neglected that he thought it dead. He could not analyze the feeling, but was conscious of a desire to seem better than he was as he looked into those honest eyes; to talk well, that he might bring that frank smile to the lips that grew either sad or scornful when he tried worldly gossip or bitter satire; and to prove himself a man under all the elegance and polish of the gentleman.

He was discovering then, what Christie learned when her turn came, that fine natures seldom fail to draw out the finer traits of those who approach them, as the little witch-hazel wand, even in the hand of a child, detects and points to hidden springs in unsuspected spots. Women often possess this gift, and, when used worthily, find it is as powerful as beauty; for, if less alluring, it is more lasting and more helpful, since it appeals, not to the senses, but to the souls of men.

Christie was one of these; and in pro-

portion as her own nature was sound and sweet, so was its power as a touchstone for the genuineness of others. It was this unconscious gift that made her wonder at the unexpected kindness she found in Mr. Fletcher, and this which made him, for an hour or two at least, heartily wish he could live his life over again and do it better.

After that evening Mr. Fletcher spoke to Christie when he met her, turned and joined her sometimes as she walked with the children, and fell into the way of lounging near when she sat reading aloud to an invalid friend on piazza or sea-shore. Christie much preferred to have no auditor but kind Miss Tudor; but finding the old lady enjoyed his chat, she resigned herself, and when he brought them new books as well as himself, she became quite cordial.

Everybody sauntered and lounged, so no one minded the little group that met day after day among the rocks. Christie read aloud, while the children revelled in sand, shells, and puddles; Miss Tudor spun endless webs of gay silk and wool, and Mr. Fletcher, with his

hat over his eyes, lay sunning himself like a luxurious lizard, as he watched the face that grew daily fairer in his sight, and listened to the pleasant voice that went reading on till all his ills and *ennui* seemed lulled to sleep as by a spell.

A week or two of this new caprice set Christie thinking. She knew that Uncle Philip was not fond of "the darlings;" it was evident that good Miss Tudor, with her mild twaddle and eternal knitting, was not the attraction; so she was forced to believe that he came for her sake alone. She laughed at herself for this fancy at first; but not possessing the sweet unconsciousness of those heroines who can live through three volumes with a burning passion before their eyes, and never see it till the proper moment comes, and Eugene goes down upon his knees, she soon felt sure that Mr. Fletcher found her society agreeable, and wished her to know it.

Being a mortal woman, her vanity was flattered, and she found herself showing that she liked it by those small signs and symbols

which lovers' eyes are so quick to see and understand—an artful bow on her hat, a flower in her belt, fresh muslin gowns, and the most becoming arrangement of her hair.

"Poor man, he has so few pleasures, I'm sure I needn't grudge him such a small one as looking at and listening to me if he likes it," she said to herself one day, as she was preparing for her daily stroll with unusual care. "But how will it end? If he only wants a mild flirtation, he is welcome to it; but if he really cares for me, I must make up my mind about it, and not deceive him. I don't believe he loves me—how can he? such an insignificant creature as I am!"

Here she looked in the glass, and as she looked the colour deepened in her cheek, her eyes shone, and a smile would set upon her lips, for the reflection showed her a very winning face under the coquettish hat put on to captivate.

"Don't be foolish, Christie! mind what you do, and be sure vanity doesn't delude you, for you are only a woman, and in things

of this sort we are so blind and silly. I'll think of this possibility soberly, but I won't flirt, and then whichever way I decide, I shall have nothing to reproach myself with."

Armed with this virtuous resolution, Christie sternly replaced the pretty hat with her old brown one, fastened up a becoming curl, which of late she had worn behind her ear, and put on a pair of stout, rusty boots, much fitter for rocks and sand than the smart slippers she was preparing to sacrifice. Then she trudged away to Miss Tudor, bent on being very quiet and reserved, as became a meek and lowly governess.

But, dear heart, how feeble are the resolutions of womankind! When she found herself sitting in her favourite nook, with the wide, blue sea glittering below, the fresh wind making her blood dance in her veins, and all the earth and sky so full of summer life and loveliness, her heart *would* sing for joy, her face *would* shine with the mere bliss of living, and underneath all this natural content the new thought, half confessed, yet

very sweet, *would* whisper, "Somebody cares for me."

If she had doubted it, the expression of Mr. Fletcher's face that morning would have dispelled the doubt, for, as she read, he was saying to himself, "Yes, this healthful, cheery, helpful creature is what I want to make life pleasant. Everything else is used up; why not try this, and make the most of my last chance? She does me good, and I don't seem to get tired of her. I can't have a long life, they tell me, nor an easy one, with the devil to pay with my vitals generally; so it would be a wise thing to provide myself with a good-tempered, faithful soul to take care of me. My fortune would pay for loss of time, and my death leave her a bonnie widow. I won't be rash, but I think I'll try it."

With this mixture of tender, selfish, and regretful thoughts in his mind, it is no wonder Mr. Fletcher's eyes betrayed him, as he lay looking at Christie. Never had she read so badly, for she could not keep her mind on her book. It *would* wander to that new and troublesome fancy of hers; she could not

help thinking that Mr. Fletcher must have been a handsome man before he was so ill; wondering if his temper was *very* bad, and fancying that he might prove both generous and kind and true to one who loved and served him well. At this point she was suddenly checked by a slip of the tongue that covered her with confusion.

She was reading "John Halifax," and instead of saying Phineas Fletcher she said Philip, and then coloured to her forehead, and lost her place. Miss Tudor did not mind it, but Mr. Fletcher laughed, and Christie thanked heaven that her face was half hidden by the old brown hat.

Nothing was said, but she was much relieved to find that Mr. Fletcher had joined a yachting party next day, and would be away for a week. During that week Christie thought over the matter, and fancied she had made up her mind. She recalled certain speeches she had heard, that had more weight with her than she had suspected. One dowager said to another, "P. F. intends to marry, I assure you, for his sister told me so,

with tears in her eyes. Men who have been gay in their youth make very good husbands when their wild oats are sown. Clara could not do better, and I should be quite content to give her to him."

"Well, dear, I should be sorry to see my Augusta his wife, for whoever he marries will be a perfect slave to him. His fortune would be a nice thing if he did not live long; but even for that my Augusta shall not be a sacrifice," returned the other matron whose Augusta had vainly tried to captivate "P. F.;" and revenged herself by calling him "a wreck, my dear, a perfect wreck!"

At another time Christie heard some girls discussing the eligibility of several gentlemen, and Mr. Fletcher was considered the best match among them.

"You can do anything you like with a husband a good deal older than yourself. He's happy with his business, his club, and his dinner, and leaves you to do what you please; just keep him comfortable, and he'll pay your bills without much fuss," said one young thing who had seen life at twenty.

"I'd take him if I had the chance, just because everybody wants him. Don't admire him a particle, but it will make a jolly stir whenever he does marry, and I wouldn't mind having a hand in it," said the second budding belle.

"I'd take him for the diamonds alone. Mamma says they are splendid, and they have been in the family for ages. He won't let Mrs. S. wear them, for they always go to the eldest son's wife. Hope he'll choose a handsome woman who will show them off well," said a third sweet girl, glancing at her own fine neck.

"He won't; he'll take some poky old maid who will cuddle him when he is sick, and keep out of his way when he is well. See if he don't."

"I saw him dawdling round with old Tudor, perhaps he means to take her, she's a capital nurse, got ill herself taking care of her father, you know."

"Perhaps he's after the governess: she's rather nice-looking, though she hasn't a bit of style."

"Gracious, no! she's a dowdy thing, always trailing round with a book and those horrid children. No danger of his marrying *her*," and a derisive laugh seemed to settle that question beyond a doubt.

"Oh, indeed!" said Christie, as the girls went trooping out of the bath-house, where this pleasing chatter had been carried on regardless of listeners. She called them "mercenary, worldly, unwomanly flirts!" and felt herself much their superior. Yet the memory of their gossip haunted her, and had its influence upon her decision, though she thought she came to it through her own good judgment and discretion.

"If he really cares for me I will listen, and not refuse till I know him well enough to decide. I'm tired of being alone, and should enjoy ease and pleasure so much. He's going abroad for the winter, and that would be charming. I'll try not to be worldly-minded and marry without love, but it does look tempting to a poor soul like me."

So Christie made up her mind to accept, if this promotion was offered her; and, while

she waited, went through so many alternations of feeling, and was so harassed by doubts and fears, that she sometimes found herself wishing it had never occurred to her.

Mr. Fletcher, meantime, with the help of many meditative cigars, was making up *his* mind. Absence only proved to him how much he needed a better time-killer than billiards, horses, or newspapers, for the long, listless days seemed endless without the cheerful governess to tone him up, like a new and agreeable sort of bitters. A gradually-increasing desire to secure this satisfaction had taken possession of him, and the thought of always having a pleasant companion, with no nerves, nonsense, or affectation about her, was an inviting idea to a man tired of fashionable follies and tormented with the *ennui* of his own society.

The gossip, wonder, and chagrin such a step would cause rather pleased his fancy; the excitement of trying almost the only thing as yet untried allured him; and deeper than all, the desire to forget the past in a better future led him to Christie by the nobler instincts

that never wholly die in any soul. He wanted her as he had wanted many other things in his life, and had little doubt that he could have her for the asking. Even if love was not abounding, surely his fortune, which hitherto had procured him all he wished (except health and happiness), could buy him a wife, when his friends made better bargains every day. So having settled the question, he came home again, and every one said the trip had done him a world of good.

Christie sat in her favourite nook one bright September morning, with the inevitable children hunting hapless crabs in a pool near by. A book lay on her knee, but she was not reading; her eyes were looking far across the blue waste before her with an eager gaze, and her face was bright with some happy thought. The sound of approaching steps disturbed her reverie, and, recognizing them, she plunged into the heart of the story, reading as if utterly absorbed, till the shadow fell athwart the page, and the voice she had expected to hear, asked blandly,—

"What book now, Miss Devon?"

"'Jane Eyre,' sir."

Mr. Fletcher sat down just where her hat-brim was no screen, pulled off his gloves, and leisurely composed himself for a comfortable lounge.

"What is your opinion of Rochester?" he asked presently.

"Not a very high one."

"Then you think Jane was a fool to love and try to make a saint of him, I suppose?"

"I like Jane, but never can forgive her marrying that man, as I haven't much faith in the saints such sinners make."

"But don't you think that a man who had only follies to regret might expect a good woman to lend him a hand and make him happy?"

"If he has wasted his life, he must take the consequences, and be content with pity and indifference, instead of respect and love. Many good women do 'lend a hand,' as you say, and it is quite Christian and amiable, I've no doubt; but I cannot think it a fair bargain."

Mr. Fletcher liked to make Christie talk,

for in the interest of the subject she forgot herself, and her chief charm for him was her earnestness. But just then the earnestness did not seem to suit him, and he said rather sharply,—

"What hard-hearted creatures you women are sometimes! Now I fancied you were one of those who wouldn't leave a poor fellow to his fate, if his salvation lay in your hands."

"I can't say what I should do in such a case; but it always seemed to me that a man should have energy enough to save himself, and not expect the 'weaker vessel,' as he calls her, to do it for him," answered Christie, with a conscious look, for Mr. Fletcher's face made her feel as if something was going to happen.

Evidently anxious to know what she *would* do in aforesaid case, Mr. Fletcher decided to put one before her as speedily as possible, so he said, in a pensive tone, and with a wistful glance,—

"You looked very happy just now when I came up. I wish I could believe that my return had anything to do with it!"

Christie wished she could control her tell-tale colour, but finding she could not, looked hard at the sea, and ignoring his tender insinuation, said, with suspicious enthusiasm,—

"I was thinking of what Mrs. Saltonstall said this morning. She asked me if I would like to go to Paris with her for the winter. It has always been one of my dreams to go abroad, and I do hope I shall not be disappointed."

Christie's blush seemed to be a truer answer than her words, and leaning a little nearer, Mr. Fletcher said in his most persuasive tone,—

"Will you go to Paris as *my* governess, instead of Charlotte's?"

Christie thought her reply was all ready; but when the moment came, she found it was not, and sat silent, feeling as if that "Yes" would promise far more than she could give. Mr. Fletcher had no doubt what the answer would be, and was in no haste to get it, for that was one of the moments that are so pleasant and so short-lived they should be

enjoyed to the utmost. He liked to watch her colour come and go, to see the asters on her bosom tremble with the quickened beating of her heart, and tasted in anticipation the satisfaction of the moment when that pleasant voice of hers would falter out its grateful assent. Drawing yet nearer, he went on, still in the persuasive tone that would have been more lover-like if it had been less assured,—

"I think I am not mistaken in believing that you care for me a little. You must know how fond I am of you, how much I need you, and how glad I should be to give all I have, if I might keep you always to make my hard life happy. May I, Christie?"

"You would soon tire of me. I have no beauty, no accomplishments, no fortune—nothing but my heart and my hand to give the man I marry. Is that enough?" asked Christie, looking at him with eyes that betrayed the hunger of an empty heart longing to be fed with genuine food.

But Mr. Fletcher did not understand its

meaning; he saw the humility in her face, thought she was overcome by the weight of the honour he did her, and tried to reassure her with the gracious air of one who wishes to lighten the favour he confers.

"It might not be for some men, but it is for me, because I want you very much. Let people say what they will, if you say 'yes,' I am satisfied. You shall not regret it, Christie; I'll do my best to make you happy; you shall travel wherever I can go with you, have what you like, if possible; and when we come back by-and-by, you shall take your place in the world as my wife. You will fill it well, I fancy, and I shall be a happy man. I've had my own way all my life, and I mean to have it now, so smile, and say, 'Yes, Philip,' like a sweet soul as you are."

But Christie did not smile, and felt no inclination to say, "Yes, Philip," for that last speech of his jarred on her ear. The tone of unconscious condescension in it wounded the woman's sensitive pride; self was too apparent, and the most generous words seemed to her like bribes. This was not the lover she

had dreamed of, the brave, true man who gave her all, and felt it could not half repay the treasure of her innocent first love. This was not the happiness she had hoped for, the perfect faith, the glad surrender, the sweet content that made all things possible, and changed this work-a-day world into a heaven while the joy lasted.

She had decided to say "Yes," but her heart said "No" decidedly, and with instinctive loyalty she obeyed it, even while she seemed to yield to the temptation which appeals to three of the strongest foibles in most women's nature,—vanity, ambition, and the love of pleasure.

"You are very kind, but you may repent it, you know so little of me," she began, trying to soften her refusal, but sadly hindered by a feeling of contempt.

"I know more about you than you think; but it makes no difference," interrupted Mr. Fletcher, with a smile that irritated Christie, even before she understood its significance. "I thought it would at first, but I found I couldn't get on without you, so I have made

up my mind to forgive and forget that my wife had ever been an actress."

Christie had forgotten it, and it would have been well for him if he had held his tongue. Now she understood the tone that had chilled her, the smile that angered her, and Mr. Fletcher's fate was settled in the drawing of a breath.

"Who told you that?" she asked quickly, while every nerve tingled with the mortification of being found out then and there in the one secret of her life.

"I saw you dancing on the beach with the children one day, and it reminded me of an actress I had once seen. I should not have remembered it but for the accident which impressed it on my mind. Powder, paint, and costume made 'Miss Douglas' a very different woman from Miss Devon, but a few cautious inquiries settled the matter, and I then understood where you got that slight soupçon of dash and daring which makes our demure governess so charming when with me."

As he spoke, Mr. Fletcher smiled again,

and kissed his hand to her with a dramatic little gesture that exasperated Christie beyond measure. She would not make light of it as he did, and submit to be forgiven for a past she was not ashamed of. Heartily wishing she had been frank at first, she resolved to have it out now, and accept nothing Mr. Fletcher offered her, not even silence.

"Yes," she said, as steadily as she could, "I *was* an actress for three years; and though it was a hard life, it was an honest one, and I'm not ashamed of it. I ought to have told Mrs. Saltonstall, but I was warned that if I did, it would be difficult to find a place, people are so prejudiced. I sincerely regret it now, and shall tell her at once, so you may save yourself the trouble."

"My dear girl, I never dreamed of telling any one!" cried Mr. Fletcher, in an injured tone. "I beg you won't speak, but trust me, and let it be a little secret between us two. I assure you it makes no difference to me, for I should marry an opera-dancer if I chose; so forget it, as I do, and set my mind at rest

upon the other point. I'm still waiting for my answer, you know."

"It is ready."

"A kind one, I'm sure. What is it, Christie?"

"No, I thank you."

"But you are not in earnest?"

"Perfectly so."

Mr. Fletcher got up suddenly and set his back against the rock, saying, in a tone of such unaffected surprise and disappointment that her heart reproached her,—

"Am I to understand that as your final answer, Miss Devon?"

"Distinctly and decidedly my final answer, Mr. Fletcher."

Christie tried to speak kindly, but she was angry with herself and him, and unconsciously showed it both in face and voice, for she was no actress off the stage, and wanted to be very true just then as a late atonement for that earlier want of candour.

A quick change passed over Mr. Fletcher's face; his cold eyes kindled with an angry spark, his lips were pale with anger,

and his voice was very bitter, as he slowly said,—

"I've made many blunders in my life, and this is one of the greatest; for I believed in a woman, was fool enough to care for her with the sincerest love I ever knew, and fancied that she would be grateful for the sacrifice I made."

He got no farther, for Christie rose straight up, and answered him with all the indignation she felt burning in her face, and stirring the voice she tried in vain to keep as steady as his own.

"The sacrifice would not have been *all* yours, for it is what we *are*, not what we *have*, that makes one human being superior to another. I am as well-born as you, in spite of my poverty; my life, I think, has been a better one than yours; my heart, I know, is fresher, and my memory has fewer faults and follies to reproach me with. What can you give me but money and position in return for the youth and freedom I should sacrifice in marrying you? Not love, for you count the cost of your bargain, as no true

lover could, and you reproach me for deceit, when in your heart you know you only care for me because I can amuse and serve you. I too deceived myself, I too see my mistake, and I decline the honour you would do me, since it is so great in your eyes that you must remind me of it as you offer it."

In the excitement of the moment Christie unconsciously spoke with something of her old dramatic fervour in voice and gesture. Mr. Fletcher saw it, and while he never had admired her so much, could not resist avenging himself for the words that angered him the more deeply for their truth. Wounded vanity and baffled will can make an ungenerous man as spiteful as a woman; and Mr. Fletcher proved it then, for he saw where Christie's pride was sorest, and touched the wound with the skill of a resentful nature.

As she paused he softly clapped his hands, saying, with a smile that made her eyes flash,—

"Very well done! infinitely superior to your Woffington, Miss Devon. I am disappointed in the woman, but I make my

compliment to the actress, and leave the stage free for another and a more successful Romeo."

Still smiling, he bowed and went away, apparently quite calm and much amused, but a more wrathful, disappointed man never crossed those sands than the one who kicked his dog and swore at himself for a fool that day when no one saw him.

For a minute Christie stood and watched him, then, feeling that she must either laugh or cry, wisely chose the former vent for her emotions, and sat down, feeling inclined to look at the whole scene from a ludicrous point of view.

"My second love-affair is a worse failure than my first, for I did pity poor Joe; but this man is detestable, and I never will forgive him that last insult. I dare say I *was* absurdly tragical, I'm apt to be so when very angry; but what a temper he has got! the white, cold kind, that smoulders and stabs instead of blazing up and being over in a minute. Thank Heaven, I'm not his wife! Well, I've made an enemy and lost my place,

for of course Mrs. Saltonstall won't keep me after this awful discovery. I'll tell her at once, for I will have no 'little secrets' with him. No Paris either, and that's the worst of it all! Never mind, I haven't sold my liberty for the Fletcher diamonds, and that's a comfort. Now a short scene with my lady, and then exit governess."

But though she laughed, Christie felt troubled at the part she had played in this affair; repented of her worldly aspirations; confessed her vanity; accepted her mortification and disappointment as a just punishment for her sins; and yet at the bottom of her heart she did enjoy it mightily.

She tried to spare Mr. Fletcher in her interview with his sister, and only betrayed her own iniquities. But, to her surprise, Mrs. Saltonstall, though much disturbed at the discovery, valued Christie as a governess, and respected her as a woman, so she was willing to bury the past, she said, and still hoped Miss Devon would remain.

Then Christie was forced to tell her why it was impossible for her to do so; and, in

her secret soul, she took a naughty satisfaction in demurely mentioning that she had refused my lord.

Mrs. Saltonstall's consternation was comical, for she had been so absorbed in her own affairs she had suspected nothing; and horror fell upon her when she learned how near dear Philip had been to the fate from which she jealously guarded him, that his property might one day benefit the darlings.

In a moment everything was changed; and it was evident to Christie that the sooner she left the better it would suit madam. The proprieties were preserved to the end, and Mrs. Saltonstall treated her with unusual respect, for she had come to honour her, and also conducted herself in a most praiseworthy manner. How she could refuse a Fletcher visibly amazed the lady; but she forgave the slight, and gently insinuated that "my brother" was perhaps only amusing himself.

Christie was but too glad to be off, and when Mrs. Saltonstall asked when she would prefer to leave, she promptly replied, 'To-morrow," received her salary, which

was forthcoming with unusual punctuality, and packed her trunks with delightful rapidity.

As the family was to leave in a week, her sudden departure caused no surprise to the few who knew her, and with kind farewells to such of her summer friends as still remained, she went to bed that night all ready for an early start. She saw nothing more of Mr. Fletcher that day, but the sound of excited voices in the drawing-room assured her that madam was having it out with her brother; and, with truly feminine inconsistency, Christie hoped that she would not be too hard upon the poor man, for, after all, it was kind of him to overlook the actress, and ask the governess to share his good things with him.

She did not repent, but she got herself to sleep, imagining a bridal trip to Paris, and dreamed so delightfully of lost splendours that the awakening was rather blank, the future rather cold and hard.

She was early astir, meaning to take the first boat and so escape all disagreeable

rencontres; and having kissed the children in their little beds with tender promises not to forget them, she took a hasty breakfast and stepped into the carriage waiting at the door. The sleepy waiters stared, a friendly housemaid nodded, and Miss Walker, the hearty English lady who did her ten miles a day, cried out, as she tramped by, blooming and bedraggled,—

"Bless me, are you off?"

"Yes, thank Heaven," answered Christie; but as she spoke Mr. Fletcher came down the steps, looking as wan and heavy-eyed as if a sleepless night had been added to his day's defeat. Leaning in at the window, he asked abruptly, but with a look she never could forget,—

"Will nothing change your answer, Christie?"

"Nothing."

His eyes said, "Forgive me," but his lips only said, "Good-bye," and the carriage rolled away.

Then, being a woman, two great tears fell on the hand still red with the lingering grasp

he had given it, and Christie said, as pitifully as if she loved him,—

"He *has* got a heart after all, and perhaps I might have been glad to fill it, if he had only shown it to me sooner. Now it is too late."

CHAPTER V.

COMPANION.

BEFORE she had time to find a new situation, Christie received a note from Miss Tudor, saying that, hearing she had left Mrs. Saltonstall, she wanted to offer her the place of companion to an invalid girl, where the duties were light and the compensation large.

"How kind of her to think of me!" said Christie gratefully. "I'll go at once and do my best to secure it, for it must be a good thing, or she wouldn't recommend it."

Away went Christie to the address sent by Miss Tudor, and as she waited at the door she thought,—

"What a happy family the Carrols must be!" for the house was one of an imposing

block in a West-end square which had its own little park, where a fountain sparkled in the autumn sunshine, and pretty children played among the fallen leaves.

Mrs. Carrol was a stately woman, still beautiful in spite of her fifty years. But though there were few lines on her forehead, few silver threads in the dark hair that lay smoothly over it, and a gracious smile showed the fine teeth, an indescribable expression of unsubmissive sorrow touched the whole face, betraying that life had brought some heavy cross, from which her wealth could purchase no release, for which her pride could find no effectual screen.

She looked at Christie with a searching eye, listened attentively when she spoke, and seemed testing her with covert care, as if the place she was to fill demanded some unusual gift or skill.

"Miss Tudor tells me that you read aloud well, sing sweetly, possess a cheerful temper, and the quiet, patient ways which are peculiarly grateful to an invalid," began Mrs. Carrol, with that keen yet wistful gaze, and

an anxious accent in her voice that went to Christie's heart.

"Miss Tudor is very kind to think so well of me and my few accomplishments. I have never been with an invalid, but I think I can promise to be patient, willing, and cheerful. My own experience of illness has taught me how to sympathize with others, and love to lighten pain. I shall be very glad to try, if you think I have any fitness for the place."

"I do," and Mrs. Carrol's face softened as she spoke, for something in Christie's words or manner seemed to please her. Then slowly, as if the task was a hard one, she added,—

"My daughter has been very ill, and is still weak and nervous. I must hint to you that the loss of one very dear to her was the cause of the illness and the melancholy which now oppresses her. Therefore we must avoid anything that can suggest or recall this trouble. She cares for nothing as yet, will see no one, and prefers to live alone. She is still so feeble—that is but natural; yet solitude is bad for her, and her physician thinks

that a new face might rouse her, and the society of one in no way connected with the painful past might interest and do her good. You see it is a little difficult to find just what we want, for a young companion is best, yet you must be discreet and firm, as few young people are."

Fancying from Mrs. Carrol's manner that Miss Tudor had said more in her favour than had been repeated to her, Christie in a few plain words told her little story, resolving to have no concealments here, and feeling that perhaps her experiences might have given her more firmness and discretion than many women of her age possessed. Mrs. Carrol seemed to find it so; the anxious look lifted a little as she listened, and when Christie ended, she said, with a sigh of relief,—

"Yes, I think Miss Tudor is right, and you *are* the one we want. Come and try it for a week, and then we can decide. Can you begin to-day?" she added, as Christie rose. "Every hour is precious, for my poor girl's sad solitude weighs on my heart, and this is my one hope."

"I will stay with pleasure," answered Christie, thinking Mrs. Carrol's anxiety excessive, yet pitying the mother's pain, for something in her face suggested the idea that she reproached herself in some way for her daughter's state.

With secret gratitude that she had dressed with care, Christie took off her things and followed Mrs. Carrol up-stairs. Entering a room in what seemed to be a wing of the great house, they found an old woman sewing.

"How is Helen to-day, nurse?" asked Mrs. Carrol, pausing.

"Poorly, ma'am. I've been in every hour, but she only says, 'Let me be quiet,' and lies looking up at the picture till it's fit to break your heart to see her," answered the woman, with a shake of the head.

"I have brought Miss Devon to sit with her a little while. Doctor advises it, and I fancy the experiment may succeed, if we can only amuse the dear child, and make her forget herself and her troubles."

"As you please, ma'am," said the old

woman, looking with little favour at the newcomer, for the good soul was jealous of any interference between herself and the child she had tended for years.

"I won't disturb her, but you shall take Miss Devon in, and tell Helen, mamma sends her love, and hopes she will make an effort for all our sakes."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Go, my dear, and do your best." With these words Mrs. Carrol hastily left the room, and Christie followed nurse.

A quick glance showed her that she was in the daintily-furnished boudoir of a rich man's daughter, but before she could take a second look her eyes were arrested by the occupant of this pretty place, and she forgot all else. On a low, luxurious couch lay a girl so beautiful and pale and still, that for an instant Christie thought her dead or sleeping. She was neither, for at the sound of a voice the great eyes opened wide, darkening and dilating with a strange expression as they fell on the unfamiliar face.

"Nurse, who is that? I told you I would

see no one. I'm too ill to be so worried," she said, in an imperious tone.

"Yes, dear, I know, but your mamma wished you to make an effort. Miss Devon is to sit with you and try to cheer you up a bit," said the old woman in a dissatisfied tone, that contrasted strangely with the tender way in which she stroked the beautiful disordered hair that hung about the girl's shoulders.

Helen knit her brows and looked most ungracious, but evidently tried to be civil, for, with a courteous wave of her hand towards an easy chair in the sunny window, she said quietly,—

"Please sit down, Miss Devon, and excuse me for a little while. I've had a bad night, and am too tired to talk just yet. There are books of all sorts, or the conservatory, if you like it better."

"Thank you. I'll read quietly till you want me. Then I shall be very glad to do anything I can for you."

With that Christie retired to the big chair, and fell to reading the first book she took up,

a good deal embarrassed by her reception, and very curious to know what would come next.

The old woman went away after folding the down coverlet carefully over her darling's feet, and Helen seemed to go to sleep.

For a time the room was very still; the fire burned softly on the marble hearth, the sun shone warmly on velvet carpet and rich hangings, the delicate breath of flowers blew in through the half-opened door that led to a gay little conservatory, and nothing but the roll of a distant carriage broke the silence now and then.

Christie's eyes soon wandered from her book to the lovely face and motionless figure on the couch. Just opposite, in a recess, hung the portrait of a young and handsome man, and below it stood a vase of flowers, a graceful Roman lamp, and several little relics, as if it were the shrine where some dead love was mourned and worshipped still.

As she looked from the living face, so pale and so pathetic in its quietude, to the painted one so full of colour, strength, and happiness,

her heart ached for poor Helen, and her eyes were wet with tears of pity. A sudden movement on the couch gave her no time to hide them, and as she hastily looked down upon her book a treacherous drop fell glittering on the page.

"What have you there so interesting?" asked Helen, in that softly imperious tone of hers.

"'Don Quixote,'" answered Christie, too much abashed to have her wits about her.

Helen smiled a melancholy smile as she rose, saying wearily,—

"They gave me that to make me laugh, but I did not find it funny; neither was it sad enough to make me cry as you do."

"I was not reading, I was"—there Christie broke down, and could have cried with vexation at the bad beginning she had made. But that involuntary tear was better balm to Helen than the most perfect tact, the most brilliant conversation. It touched and won her without words, for sympathy works miracles. Her whole face changed, and her mournful eyes grew soft as, with the gentle freedom of

a child, she lifted Christie's downcast face, and said, with a falter in her voice,—

"I know you were pitying me. Well, I need pity, and from you I'll take it, because you don't force it on me. Have *you* been ill and wretched too? I think so, else you would never care to come and shut yourself up here with me!"

"I have been ill, and I know how hard it is to get one's spirits back again. I've had my troubles, too, but not heavier than I could bear, thank God."

"What made you ill? Would you mind telling me about it? I seem to fancy hearing other people's woes, though it can't make mine seem lighter."

"A piece of the Castle of the Sun fell on my head and nearly killed me," and Christie laughed, in spite of herself, at the astonishment in Helen's face. "I was an actress once: your mother knows, and didn't mind," she added quickly.

"I'm glad of that. I used to wish I could be one, I was so fond of the theatre. They should have consented, it would have given

me something to do; and however hard it is, it couldn't be worse than this." Helen spoke vehemently, and an excited flush rose to her white cheeks; then she checked herself, and dropped into a chair, saying hurriedly,—

"Tell about it; don't let me think, it's bad for me."

Glad to be set to work, and bent on retrieving her first mistake, Christie plunged into her theatrical experiences, and talked away in her most lively style. People usually get eloquent when telling their own story, and true tales are always the most interesting. Helen listened at first with a half-absent air, but presently grew more attentive, and, when the catastrophe came, sat erect, quite absorbed in the interest of this glimpse behind the curtain.

Charmed with her success, Christie branched off right and left, stimulated by questions, led on by suggestive incidents, and generously supplied by memory. Before she knew it, she was telling her whole history in the most expansive manner, for women soon get sociable together, and Helen's interest flattered her

immensely. Once she made her laugh at some droll trifle, and as if the unaccustomed sound had startled her, old nurse popped in her head, but seeing nothing amiss retired, wondering what on earth that girl could be doing to cheer up Miss Helen so.

"Tell about your lovers—you must have had some, actresses always do. Happy women, they can love as they like!" said Helen, with the inquisitive frankness of an invalid for whom etiquette has ceased to exist.

Remembering in time that this was a forbidden subject, Christie smiled and shook her head.

"I had a few, but one does not tell those secrets, you know."

Evidently disappointed, and a little displeased at being reminded of her want of good breeding, Helen got up and began to wander restlessly about the room. Presently, as if wishing to atone for her impatience, she bade Christie come and see her flowers. Following her, the new companion found herself in a little world where perpetual summer reigned.

Vines curtained the roof, slender shrubs and trees made leafy walls on either side, flowers bloomed above and below, birds carolled in half-hidden prisons, aquariums and ferneries stood all about, and the soft plash of a little fountain made pleasant music as it rose and fell.

Helen threw herself wearily down on a pile of cushions that lay beside the basin, and, beckoning Christie to sit near, said, as she pressed her hands to her hot forehead and looked up with a distressful brightness in the haggard eyes that seemed to have no rest in them,—

"Please sing to me; any humdrum air will do. I am so tired, and yet I cannot sleep. If my head would only stop this dreadful thinking, and let me forget one hour, it would do me so much good."

"I know the feeling, and I'll try what Lucy used to do to quiet me. Put your poor head in my lap, dear, and lie quite still while I cool and comfort it."

Obeying like a worn-out child, Helen lay motionless while Christie, dipping her fingers

in the basin, passed the wet tips softly to and fro across the hot forehead and the thin temples where the pulses throbbed so fast. And while she soothed she sang the "Land o' the Leal," and sang it well; for the tender words, the plaintive air were dear to her, because her mother loved and sang it to her years ago. Slowly the heavy eyelids drooped, slowly the lines of pain were smoothed away from the broad brow, slowly the restless hands grew still, and Helen lay asleep.

So intent upon her task was Christie, that she forgot herself till the discomfort of her position reminded her that she had a body. Fearing to wake the poor girl in her arms, she tried to lean against the basin, but could not reach a cushion to lay upon the cold stone ledge. An unseen hand supplied the want, and, looking round, she saw two young men standing behind her.

Helen's brothers, without doubt; for, though utterly unlike in expression, some of the family traits were strongly marked in both. The elder wore the dress of a priest, had a pale, ascetic face, with melancholy eyes,

stern mouth, and the absent air of one who leads an inward life. The younger had a more attractive face, for though bearing marks of dissipation, it betrayed a generous, ardent nature, proud and wilful, yet lovable in spite of all defects. He was very boyish still, and plainly showed how much he felt, as, with a hasty nod to Christie, he knelt down beside his sister, saying, in a whisper,—

"Look at her, Augustine! so beautiful, so quiet! What a comfort it is to see her like herself again."

"Ah yes; and, but for the sin of it, I could find it in my heart to wish she might never wake!" returned the other gloomily.

"Don't say that! How could we live without her?" Then, turning to Christie, the younger said, in a friendly tone,—

"You must be very tired; let us lay her on the sofa. It is very damp here, and if she sleeps long you will faint from weariness."

Carefully lifting her, the brothers carried the sleeping girl into her room, and laid her down. She sighed as her head touched the pillow, and her arm clung to Harry's neck, as

if she felt his nearness even in sleep. He put his cheek to hers, and lingered over her with an affectionate solicitude beautiful to see. Augustine stood silent, grave and cold as if he had done with human ties, yet found it hard to sever this one, for he stretched his hand above his sister as if he blessed her, then, with another grave bow to Christie, went away as noiselessly as he had come. But Harry kissed the sleeper tenderly, whispered "Be kind to her" with an imploring voice, and hurried from the room, as if to hide the feeling that he must not show.

A few minutes later the nurse brought in a note from Mrs. Carrol.

"My son tells me that Helen is asleep, and you look very tired. Leave her to Hester, now; you have done enough to-day, so let me thank you heartily, and send you home for a quiet night before you continue your good work to-morrow."

Christie went, found a carriage waiting for her, and drove home, very happy at the success of her first attempt at companionship.

The next day she entered upon the new

duties with interest and good-will, for this was work in which heart took part, as well as head and hand. Many things surprised, and some things perplexed her, as she came to know the family better. But she discreetly held her tongue, used her eyes, and did her best to please.

"Mrs. Carrol seemed satisfied, often thanked her for her faithfulness to Helen, but seldom visited her daughter, never seemed surprised or grieved that the girl expressed no wish to see her, and, though her handsome face always wore its gracious smile, Christie soon felt very sure that it was a mask put on to hide some heavy sorrow from a curious world.

Augustine never came except when Helen was asleep, then, like a shadow, he passed in and out, always silent, cold and grave, but in his eyes the gloom of some remorseful pain that prayers and penances seemed powerless to heal.

Harry came every day, and no matter how melancholy, listless, or irritable his sister might be, for him she always had a smile, an

affectionate greeting, a word of praise, or a tender warning against the reckless spirit that seemed to possess him. The love between them was very strong, and Christie found a never-failing pleasure in watching them together, for then Helen showed what she once had been, and Harry was his best self. A boy still, in spite of his one and twenty years, he seemed to feel that Helen's room was a safe refuge from the temptations that beset one of his thoughtless and impetuous nature. Here he came to confess his faults and follies with the frankness which is half sad, half comical, and wholly charming in a good-hearted young scatter-brain. Here he brought gay gossip, lively descriptions, and masculine criticisms of the world he moved in. All his hopes and plans, joys and sorrows, successes and defeats he told to Helen. And she, poor soul, in this one happy love of her sad life, forgot a little the burden of despair that darkened all the world to her. For his sake she smiled, to him she talked when others got no word from her, and Harry's salvation was the only duty that she owned or tried to fulfil.

A younger sister was away at school, but the others seldom spoke of her, and Christie tired herself with wondering why Bella never wrote to Helen, and why Harry seemed to have nothing but a gloomy sort of pity to bestow upon the blooming girl whose picture hung in the great drawing-room below.

It was a very quiet winter, yet a very pleasant one to Christie, for she felt herself loved and trusted, saw that she suited, and believed that she was doing good, as women best love to do it, by bestowing sympathy and care with generous devotion.

Helen and Harry loved her like an elder sister; Augustine showed that he was grateful, and Mrs. Carrol sometimes forgot to put on her mask before one who seemed fast becoming *confidante* as well as companion.

In the spring the family went to the fine old country-house just out of town, and here Christie and her charge led a freer, happier life. Walking and driving, boating and gardening, with pleasant days on the wide terrace, where Helen swung idly in her hammock, while Christie read or talked to her; and summer twilights beguiled with music, or the

silent reveries more eloquent than speech, which real friends may enjoy together, and find the sweeter for the mute companionship.

Harry was with them, and devoted to his sister, who seemed slowly to be coming out of her sad gloom, won by patient tenderness and the cheerful influences all about her.

Christie's heart was full of pride and satisfaction, as she saw the altered face, heard the tone of interest in that once hopeless voice, and felt each day more sure that Helen had outlived the loss that seemed to have broken her heart.

Alas, for Christie's pride, for Harry's hope, and for poor Helen's bitter fate! When all was brightest, the black shadow came; when all looked safest, danger was at hand; and when the past seemed buried, the ghost which haunted it returned, for the punishment of a broken law is as inevitable as death.

When settled in town again Bella came home, a gay, young girl, who should have brought sunshine and happiness into her home. But from the hour she returned a strange anxiety seemed to possess the others.

Mrs. Carrol watched over her with sleepless care, was evidently full of maternal pride in the lovely creature, and began to dream dreams about her future. She seemed to wish to keep the sisters apart, and said to Christie, as if to explain this wish,—

"Bella was away when Helen's trouble and illness came; she knows very little of it, and I do not want her to be saddened by the knowledge. Helen cares only for Hal, and Bella is too young to be of any use to my poor girl; therefore the less they see of each other the better for both. I am sure you agree with me?" she added, with that covert scrutiny which Christie had often felt before.

She could but acquiesce in the mother's decision, and devoted herself more faithfully than ever to Helen, who soon needed all her care and patience, for a terrible unrest grew upon her, bringing sleepless nights again, moody days, and all the old afflictions with redoubled force.

Bella "came out," and began her career as a beauty and a belle most brilliantly. Harry was proud of her, but seemed jealous of other

men's admiration for his charming sister, and would excite both Helen and himself over the flirtations into which "that child," as they called her, plunged with all the zest of a light-hearted girl whose head was a little turned with sudden and excessive adoration.

In vain Christie begged Harry not to report these things; in vain she hinted that Bella had better not come to show herself to Helen night after night in all the dainty splendour of her youth and beauty; in vain she asked Mrs. Carrol to let her go away to some quieter place with Helen, since she never could be persuaded to join in any gaiety at home or abroad. All seemed wilful, blind, or governed by the fear of the gossiping world.

So the days rolled on till an event occurred which enlightened Christie, with startling abruptness, and showed her the skeleton that haunted this unhappy family.

Going in one morning to Helen, she found her walking to and fro, as she often walked of late, with hurried steps and excited face as if driven by some power beyond her control.

"Good morning, dear. I'm so sorry you

had a restless night, and wish you had sent for me. Will you come out now for an early drive? It's a lovely day, and your mother thinks it would do you good," began Christie, troubled by the state in which she found the girl.

But as she spoke Helen turned on her, crying passionately,—

"My mother! don't speak of her to me; I hate her!"

"Oh, Helen, don't say that. Forgive and forget if she has displeased you, and don't exhaust yourself by brooding over it. Come, dear, and let us soothe ourselves with a little music. I want to hear that new song again, though I can never hope to sing it as you do."

"Sing!" echoed Helen, with a shrill laugh, "you don't know what you ask. Could *you* sing when your heart was heavy with the knowledge of a sin about to be committed by those nearest to you? Don't try to quiet me, I *must* talk whether you listen or not; I shall go frantic if I don't tell some one; all the world will know it soon. Sit down, I'll not

hurt you, but don't thwart me or you'll be sorry for it."

Speaking with a vehemence that left her breathless, Helen thrust Christie down upon a seat, and went on with an expression in her face that bereft the listener of power to move or speak.

"Harry has just told me of it; he was very angry, and I saw it, and made him tell me. Poor boy, he can keep nothing from *me*. I've been dreading it, and now it's coming. You don't know it, then? Young Butler is in love with Bella, and no one has prevented it. Think how wicked when such a curse is on us all."

The question, "What curse?" rose involuntarily to Christie's lips, but did not pass them; for, as if she read the thought, Helen answered it in a whisper that made the blood tingle in the other's veins, so full of ominous suggestion was it,—

"The curse of insanity I mean. We are all mad, or shall be; we come of a mad race, and for years we have gone recklessly on bequeathing this awful inheritance to our

descendants. It should end with us, we are the last; none of us should marry; none dare think of it but Bella, and she knows nothing. She must be told, she must be kept from the sin of deceiving her lover, the agony of seeing her children become what I am, and what we all may be."

Here Helen wrung her hands and paced the room in such a paroxysm of impotent despair that Christie sat bewildered and aghast, wondering if this were true or but the fancy of a troubled brain. Mrs. Carrol's face and manner returned to her with sudden vividness, so did Augustine's gloomy expression, and the strange wish uttered over his sleeping sister long ago. Harry's reckless, aimless life might be explained in this way; and all that had perplexed her through that year. Everything confirmed the belief that this tragical assertion was true, and Christie covered up her face, murmuring, with an involuntary shiver,—

"My God, how terrible!"

Helen came and stood before her with such grief and penitence, in her countenance that

for a moment it conquered the despair that had broken bounds.

"We should have told you this at first; I longed to do it, but I was afraid you'd go and leave me. I was so lonely, so miserable, Christie. I could not give you up when I had learned to love you; and I did learn very soon, for no wretched creature ever needed help and comfort more than I. For your sake I tried to be quiet, to control my shattered nerves, and hide my desperate thoughts. You helped me very much, and your unconsciousness made me doubly watchful. Forgive me; don't desert me now, for the old horror may be coming back, and I want you more than ever."

Too much moved to speak, Christie held out her hands with a face full of pity, love, and grief. Poor Helen clung to them as if her only help lay there, and for a moment was quite still. But not long; the old anguish was too sharp to be borne in silence; the relief of confidence once tasted was too great to be denied; and, breaking loose, she went to and fro again, pouring out the bitter

secret which had been weighing upon heart and conscience for a year.

"You wonder that I hate my mother; let me tell you why. When she was beautiful and young she married, knowing the sad history of my father's family. He was rich, she poor and proud; ambition made her wicked, and she did it after being warned that, though he might escape, his children were sure to inherit the curse, for when one generation goes free it falls more heavily upon the rest. She knew it all, and yet she married him. I have *her* to thank for all I suffer, and I *cannot* love her though she *is* my mother. It may be wrong to say these things, but they are true; they burn in my heart, and I must speak out; for I tell you there comes a time when children judge their parents as men and women, in spite of filial duty, and woe to those whose actions change affection and respect to hatred or contempt."

The bitter grief, the solemn fervour of her words, both touched and awed Christie too much for speech. Helen had passed beyond the bounds of ceremony, fear, or shame: her

hard lot, her dark experience, set her apart and gave her the sad right to utter the bare truth. To her heart's core Christie felt that warning; and for the first time saw what many never see, or wilfully deny—the awful responsibility that lies on every man and woman's soul, forbidding them to entail upon the innocent the burden of their own infirmities, the curse that surely follows their own sins.

Sad and stern, as an accusing angel's voice, that most unhappy daughter spoke,—

"If ever a woman had cause to repent, it is my mother; but she will not, and till she does, God has forsaken us. Nothing can subdue her pride, not even an affliction like mine. She hides the truth; she hides me, and lets the world believe I am dying of consumption; not a word about insanity, and no one knows the secret beyond ourselves, but doctor, nurse, and you. This is why I was not sent away, but for a year was shut up in that room yonder where the door is always locked. If you look in, you'll see barred windows, guarded fire, muffled walls, and other sights to chill

your blood when you remember all those dreadful things were meant for me."

"Don't speak, don't think of them! Don't talk any more; let me do something to comfort you, for my heart is broken with all this," cried Christie, panic-stricken at the picture Helen's words had conjured up.

"I *must* go on! There is no rest for me till I have tried to lighten this burden by sharing it with you. Let me talk, let me wear myself out, then you shall help and comfort me, if there is any help and comfort for such as I. Now I can tell you all about my Edward, and you'll listen, though mamma forbade it. Three years ago my father died, and we came here. I was well then, and oh, how happy!"

Clasping her hands above her head, she stood like a beautiful, pale image of despair: tearless and mute, but with such a world of anguish in the eyes lifted to the smiling picture opposite that it needed no words to tell the story of a broken heart.

"How I loved him!" she said softly, while her whole face glowed for an instant with the

light and warmth of a deathless passion. "How I loved him, and how he loved me! Too well to let me darken both our lives with a remorse which would come too late for a just atonement. I thought him cruel then—I bless him for it now. I had far rather be the innocent sufferer I am than a wretched woman like my mother. I shall never see him any more, but I know he thinks of me far away in India; and when I die, one faithful heart will remember me."

There her voice faltered and failed, and for a moment the fire of her eyes was quenched in tears. Christie thought the reaction had come, and rose to go and comfort her. But instantly Helen's hand was on her shoulder, and pressing her back into her seat, she said, almost fiercely,—

"I'm not done yet: you must hear the whole, and help me to save Bella. We knew nothing of the blight that hung over us till father told Augustine upon his death-bed. August, urged by mother, kept it to himself, and went away to bear it as he could. He should have spoken out and saved me in time.

But not till he came home and found me engaged did he find courage to warn me of the fate in store for us. So Edward tore himself away, although it broke his heart, and I—do you see that?"

With a quick gesture she rent open her dress, and on her bosom Christie saw a scar that made her turn yet paler than before.

"Yes, I tried to kill myself; but they would not let me die, so the old tragedy of our house begins again. August became a priest, hoping to hide his calamity and expiate his father's sin by endless penances and prayers. Harry turned reckless; for what had he to look forward to? A short life and a gay one, he says, and when his turn comes he will spare himself long suffering as I tried to do it. Bella was never told; she was so young they kept her ignorant of all they could, even the knowledge of my state. She was long away at school; but now she has come home, now she has learned to love, and is going blindly as I went, because no one tells her what she *must* know soon or late. Mamma will not. August hesitates, remembering me. Harry

swears he will speak out, but I implore him not to do it, for he will be too violent; and I am powerless. I never knew about this man till Hal told me to-day. Bella only comes in for a moment, and I have no chance to tell her she must *not* love him."

Pressing her hands to her temples, Helen resumed her restless march again, but suddenly broke out more violently than before,—

"Now do you wonder why I am half frantic? Now will you ask me to sing and smile, and sit calmly by while this wrong goes on? You have done much for me, and God will bless you for it; but you cannot keep me sane. Death is the only cure for a mad Carrol, and I'm so young, so strong, it will be long in coming, unless I hurry it."

She clenched her hands, set her teeth, and looked about her as if ready for any desperate act that should set her free from the dark and dreadful future that lay before her.

For a moment Christie feared and trembled; then pity conquered fear. She forgot herself and only remembered this poor girl, so hopeless, helpless, and afflicted. Led by a sudden

impulse, she put both arms about her, and held her close with a strong but silent tenderness better than any bonds. At first, Helen seemed unconscious of it, as she stood rigid and motionless, with her wild eyes dumbly imploring help of earth and heaven. Suddenly both strength and excitement seemed to leave her, and she would have fallen but for the living, loving prop that sustained her.

Still silent, Christie laid her down, kissed her white lips, and busied herself about her till she looked up quite herself again, but so wan and weak it was pitiful to see her.

"It's over now," she whispered, with a desolate sigh. "Sing to me, and keep the evil spirit quiet for a little while. To-morrow, if I'm strong enough, we'll talk about poor little Bella."

And Christie sang, with tears dropping fast upon the keys that made a soft accompaniment to the sweet old hymns which soothed this troubled soul as David's music brought repose to Saul.

When Helen slept at last from sheer exhaustion, Christie executed the resolution she

had made as soon as the excitement of that stormy scene was over. She went straight to Mrs. Carrol's room, and, undeterred by the presence of her sons, told all that had passed. They were evidently not unprepared for it, thanks to old Hannah, who had overheard enough of Helen's wild words to know that something was amiss, and had reported accordingly; but none of them had ventured to interrupt the interview, lest Helen should be driven to desperation as before.

"Mother, Helen is right; we should speak out, and not hide this bitter fact any longer. The world will pity us, and we must bear the pity, but it would condemn us for deceit, and we should deserve the condemnation if we let this misery go on. Living a lie will ruin us all. Bella will be destroyed as Helen was; I am only the shadow of a man now, and Hal is killing himself as fast as he can, to avoid the fate we all dread."

Augustine spoke first, Mrs. Carrol sat speechless with her trouble as Christie paused.

"Keep to your prayers, and let me go my

own way; it's the shortest," muttered Harry, with his face hidden, and his head down on his folded arms.

"Boys, boys, you'll kill me if you say such things! I have more now than I can bear. Don't drive me wild with your reproaches to each other!" cried their mother, her heart rent with the remorse that came too late.

"No fear of that; *you* are not a Carrol," answered Harry, with the pitiless bluntness of a resentful and rebellious boy.

Augustine turned on him with a wrathful flash of the eye, and a warning ring in his stern voice, as he pointed to the door.

"You shall not insult your mother! Ask her pardon, or go!"

"She should ask mine! I'll go. When you want me, you'll know where to find me." And, with a reckless laugh, Harry stormed out of the room.

Augustine's indignant face grew full of a new trouble as the door banged below, and he pressed his thin hands tightly together, saying, as if to himself,—

"Heaven help me! Yes, I do know; for,

night after night, I find and bring the poor lad home from gambling-tables and the hells where souls like his are lost."

Here Christie thought to slip away, feeling that it was no place for her now that her errand was done. But Mrs. Carrol called her back.

"Miss Devon—Christie—forgive me that I did not trust you sooner. It was so hard to tell; I hoped so much from time; I never could believe that my poor children would be made the victims of my mistake. Do not forsake us: Helen loves you so. Stay with her, I implore you, and let a most unhappy mother plead for a most unhappy child." Then Christie went to the poor woman, and earnestly assured her of love and loyalty; for now she felt doubly bound to them because they trusted her.

"What shall we do?" they said to her, with pathetic submission, turning like sick people to a healthful soul for help and comfort.

"Tell Bella all the truth, and help her to refuse her lover. Do this just thing, and

God will strengthen you to bear the consequences," was her answer, though she trembled at the responsibility they put upon her.

"Not yet," cried Mrs. Carrol. "Let the poor child enjoy the holidays with a light heart; then we will tell her, and then heaven help us all!"

So it was decided; for only a week or two of the old year remained, and no one had the heart to rob poor Bella of the little span of blissful ignorance that now remained to her.

A terrible time was that to Christie, for while one sister, blessed with beauty, youth, love, and pleasure, tasted life at its sweetest, the other sat in the black shadow of a growing dread, and wearied Heaven with piteous prayers for her relief.

"The old horror is coming back; I feel it creeping over me. Don't let it come, Christie! Stay by me! Help me! Keep me sane! and if you cannot, ask God to take me quickly!"

With words like these, poor Helen clung

to Christie; and, soul and body, Christie devoted herself to the afflicted girl. She would not see her mother; and the unhappy mother haunted that closed door, hungering for the look, the word, that never came to her. Augustine was all her consolation, and, during those troublous days, the priest was forgotten in the son. But Harry was all in all to Helen then; and it was touching to see how these unfortunate young creatures clung to one another, she tenderly trying to keep him from the wild life that was surely hastening the fate he might otherwise escape for years, and he patiently bearing all her moods, eager to cheer and soothe the sad captivity from which he could not save her.

These tender ministrations seemed to be blessed at last; and Christie began to hope the haunting terror would pass by, as quiet gloom succeeded to wild excitement. The cheerful spirit of the season seemed to reach even that sad room; and in preparing gifts for others, Helen seemed to find a little of that best of all gifts—peace for herself.

On New Year's morning, Christie found her garlanding her lover's picture with white roses and the myrtle sprays brides wear.

"These were his favourite flowers, and I meant to make my wedding wreath of this sweet-scented myrtle, because he gave it to me," she said with a look that made Christie's eyes grow dim. "Don't grieve for me, dear; we shall surely meet hereafter, though so far asunder here. Nothing can part us there, I devoutly believe; for we leave our burdens all behind us when we go." Then, in a lighter tone, she said, with her arm on Christie's neck,—

"This day is to be a happy one, no matter what comes after it. I'm going to be my own self for a little while, and forget there's such a word as sorrow. Help me to dress, so that when the boys come up they may find the sister Nell they have not seen for two long years."

"Will you wear this, my darling? Your mother sends it, and she tried to have it dainty and beautiful enough to please you. See, your own colours, though the bows are

only laid on, that they may be changed for others if you like."

As she spoke, Christie lifted the cover of the box old Hester had just brought in, and displayed a cashmere wrapper creamy-white, silk-lined, down-trimmed, and delicately relieved by rosy knots, like holly-berries lying upon snow. Helen looked at it without a word for several minutes; then gathering up the ribbons, with a strange smile, she said,—

"I like it better so; but I'll not wear it yet."

"Bless and save us, deary; it *must* have a bit of colour somewhere, else it looks just like a shroud," cried Hester, and then wrung her hands in dismay as Helen answered quietly,—

"Ah, well, keep it for me, then. I shall be happier when I wear it so than in the gayest gown I own; for when you put it on, this poor head and heart of mine will be quiet at last."

Motioning Hester to remove the box, Christie tried to banish the cloud her unlucky

words had brought to Helen's face, by chatting cheerfully as she helped her make herself "pretty for the boys."

All that day she was unusually calm and sweet, and seemed to yield herself wholly to the happy influences of the hour; gave and received her gifts so cheerfully that her brothers watched her with delight, and unconscious Bella said, as she hung about her sister, with loving admiration in her eyes,—

"I always thought you would get well, and now I am sure of it, for you look as you used before I went away to school, and seem just like our own dear Nell."

"I'm glad of that; I want you to feel so, my Bella. I'll accept your happy prophecy, and hope I may get well soon, very soon."

So cheerfully she spoke, so tranquilly she smiled, that all rejoiced over her, believing, with love's blindness, that she might yet conquer her malady in spite of their forebodings.

It was a very happy day to Christie, not only that she was generously remembered and

made one of them by all the family, but because this change for the better in Helen made her heart sing for joy. She had given time, health, and much love to the task, and ventured now to hope they had not been given in vain. One thing only marred her happiness—the sad estrangement of the daughter from her mother, and that evening she resolved to take advantage of Helen's tender mood, and plead for the poor soul who dared not plead for herself.

As the brothers and sisters said good-night, Helen clung to them as if loth to part, saying, with each embrace,—

"Keep hoping for me, Bella; kiss me, Harry; bless me, Augustine; and all wish for me a happier New Year than the last."

When they were gone, she wandered slowly round the room, stood long before the picture with its fading garland, sung a little softly to herself, and came at last to Christie, saying like a tired child,—

"I have been good all day; now let me rest."

"One thing has been forgotten, dear," began Christie, fearing to disturb the quietude that seemed to have been so dearly bought.

Helen understood her, and looked up with a sane, sweet face out of which all resentful bitterness had passed.

"No, Christie, not forgotten, only kept until the last. To-day is a good day to forgive as we would be forgiven, and I mean to do it before I sleep." Then holding Christie close, she added, with a quiver of emotion in her voice,—"I have no words warm enough to thank you, my good angel, for all you have been to me, but I know it will give you great pleasure to do one thing more. Give dear mamma my love, and tell her that when I am quiet for the night I want her to come and get me to sleep with the old lullaby she used to sing when I was a little child."

No gift bestowed that day was so precious to Christie as the joy of carrying this loving message from daughter to mother. How Mrs. Carrol received it need not be told. She would have gone at once, but Christie

begged her to wait till rest and quiet, after the efforts of the day, had prepared Helen for an interview which might undo all that had been done if too hastily attempted.

Hester always waited upon her child at night; so, feeling that she might be wanted later, Christie went to her own room to rest. Quite sure that Mrs. Carrol would come to tell her what had passed, she waited for an hour or two, then went to ask of Hester how the visit had sped.

"Her mamma came up long ago, but the dear thing was fast asleep, so I wouldn't let her be disturbed, and Mrs. Carrol went away again," said the old woman, rousing from a nap.

Grieved at the mother's disappointment, Christie stole in, hoping that Helen might rouse. She did not, and Christie was about to leave her, when, as she bent to smooth the tumbled coverlet, something dropped at her feet,—only a little pearl-handled penknife of Harry's; but her heart stood still with fear, for it was open, and as she took it up a red stain came off upon her hand.

Helen's face was turned away, and, bending nearer, Christie saw how deathly pale it looked in the shadow of the darkened room. She listened at her lips, only a faint flutter of breath parted them; she lifted up the averted head, and on the white throat saw a little wound from which the blood still flowed. Then, like a flash of light, the meaning of the sudden change which came over her grew clear —her brave efforts to make the last day happy, her tender good-night partings, her wish to be at peace with every one, the tragic death she had chosen rather than live out the tragic life that lay before her.

Christie's nerves had been tried to the uttermost; the shock of this discovery was too much for her, and, in the act of calling for help, she fainted for the first time in her life.

When she was herself again, the room was full of people; terror-stricken faces passed before her; broken voices whispered, "It is too late;" and, as she saw the group about the bed, she wished for unconsciousness again.

Helen lay in her mother's arms at last, quietly breathing her life away, for though everything that love and skill could devise had been tried to save her, the little knife in that desperate hand had done its work, and this world held no more suffering for her. Harry was down upon his knees beside her, trying to stifle his passionate grief. Augustine prayed audibly above her, and the fervour of his broken words comforted all hearts but one. Bella was clinging, panic-stricken, to the kind old doctor, who was sobbing like a boy, for he had loved and served poor Helen as faithfully as if she had been his own.

"Can nothing save her?" Christie whispered, as the prayer ended, and a sound of bitter weeping filled the room.

"Nothing; she is sane and safe at last, thank God!"

Christie could not but echo his thanks, giving, for the blessed tranquillity of the girl's countenance was such as none but death, the great healer, can bring; and as they looked her eyes opened, beautifully clear and calm

before they closed for ever. From face to face they passed as if they looked for some one, and her lips moved in vain efforts to speak.

Christie went to her, but still the wide, wistful eyes searched the room as if unsatisfied, and, with a longing that conquered the mortal weakness of the body, the heart sent forth one tender cry,—

"My mother—I want my mother!"

There was no need to repeat the piteous call, for, as it left her lips, she saw her mother's face bending over her, and felt her mother's arms gathering her in an embrace which held her close even after death had set its seal upon the voiceless prayers for pardon which passed between those reunited hearts.

When she was asleep at last, Christie and her mother made her ready for the grave, weeping tender tears as they folded her in the soft, white garment she had put by for that sad hour; and on her breast they laid the flowers she had hung about her lover as a farewell gift. So beautiful she looked when

all was done, that in the early dawn they called her brothers, that they might not lose the memory of the blessed peace that shone upon her face, a mute assurance that for her the new year had happily begun.

"Now my work here is done, and I must go," thought Christie, when the waves of life closed over the spot where another tired swimmer had gone down. But she found that one more task remained for her before she left the family which, on her coming, she had thought so happy.

Mrs. Carrol, worn out with the long effort to conceal her secret cross, broke down entirely under this last blow, and besought Christie to tell Bella all that she must know. It was a hard task, but Christie accepted it, and when the time came, found that there was very little to be told, for at the death-bed of the elder sister, the younger had learned much of the sad truth. Thus prepared, she listened to all that was most carefully and tenderly confided to her, and when the heavy tale was done, she surprised Christie by the unsuspected strength she showed. No tears,

no lamentations, for she was her mother's daughter, and inherited the pride that can bear heavy burdens if they are borne unseen.

"Tell me what I must do, and I will do it," she said, with the quiet despair of one who submits to the inevitable, but will not complain.

When Christie with difficulty told her that she should give up her lover, Bella bowed her head and for a moment could not speak, then lifted it as if defying her own weakness, and spoke out bravely,—

"It shall be done, for it is right. It is very hard for *me*, because I love him; he will not suffer much, for he can love again. I should be glad of that, and I'll try to wish it for his sake. He is young, and if, as Harry says, he cares more for my fortune than myself, so much the better. What next, Christie?"

Amazed and touched at the courage of the creature she had fancied a sort of lovely butterfly, to be crushed by a single blow, Christie took heart, and, instead of soothing

sympathy, gave her the solace best fitted for strong natures—something to do for others. What inspired her, Christie never knew; perhaps it was the year of self-denying service she had rendered for pity's sake; such devotion is its own reward, and now within herself she discovered unsuspected powers.

"Live for your mother and your brothers, Bella; they need you sorely, and in time I know you will find true consolation in it, although you must relinquish much. Sustain your mother, cheer Augustine, watch over Harry, and be to them what Helen longed to be."

"And fail to do it, as she failed!" cried Bella, with a shudder.

"Listen, and let me give you this hope, for I sincerely do believe it. Since I came here I have read many books, thought much, and talked often with Dr. Shirley about this sad affliction. He thinks you and Harry may escape it, if you will. You are like your mother in temperament and temper! you have self-control, strong wills, good nerves, and cheerful spirits. Poor Harry is wilfully spoil-

ing all his chances now; but you may save him, and, in the endeavour, save yourself."

"Oh, Christie, may I hope it? Give me one chance of escape, and I will suffer any hardship to keep it. Let me see anything before me but a life and death like Helen's, and I'll bless you for ever!" cried Bella, welcoming this ray of light as a prisoner welcomes sunshine in his cell.

Christie trembled at the power of her words, yet, honestly believing them, she let them uplift this disconsolate soul, trusting that they might be in time fulfilled through God's mercy and the saving grace of sincere endeavour.

Holding fast to this frail spar, Bella bravely took up arms against her sea of troubles, and rode out the storm. When her lover came to know his fate, she hid her heart, and answered "No!" finding a bitter satisfaction in the end, for Harry was right, and when the fortune was denied him young Butler did not mourn the woman long. Pride helped Bella to bear it; but it needed all her courage to look down the coming years, so bare of all

that makes life sweet to youthful souls, so desolate and dark with duty alone to cheer the thorny way, and the haunting shadow of her race lurking in the background.

Submission and self-sacrifice are stern, sad angels, but in time one learns to know and love them, for when they have chastened they uplift and bless. Dimly discerning this, poor Bella put her hands in theirs, saying, like a little child too blind with its own tears to see the way, "Lead me, teach me; I will follow and obey you."

All soon felt that they could not stay in a house so full of heavy memories, and decided to return to their old home. They begged Christie to go with them, using every argument and entreaty their affection could suggest. But Christie needed rest, longed for freedom, and felt that in spite of their regard it would be very hard for her to live among them any longer. Her healthy nature needed brighter influences, stronger comrades, and the memory of Helen weighed so heavily upon her heart that she was eager to forget it for a time in other scenes and other work.

So they parted, very sadly, very tenderly; and laden with good gifts Christie went on her way weary but well satisfied, for she had earned her rest.

CHAPTER VI.

SEAMSTRESS.

FOR some weeks Christie rested and refreshed herself by making her room gay and comfortable with the gifts lavished on her by the Carrols, and by sharing with others the money which Harry had smuggled into her possession after she had steadily refused to take one penny more than the sum agreed upon when she first went to them.

She took infinite satisfaction in sending one hundred dollars to Uncle Enos, for she had accepted what he gave her as a loan, and set her heart on repaying every fraction of it. Another hundred she gave to Hepsey, who found her out and came to report her trials and tribulations. The good soul had ventured South, and tried to buy her mother.

But "ole missis" would not let her go at any price, and the faithful chattel would not run away. Sorely disappointed, Hepsey had been obliged to submit; but her trip was not a failure, for she liberated several brothers, and sent them triumphantly to Canada.

"You *must* take it, Hepsey, for I could not rest happy if I put it away to lie idle while you can save men and women from torment with it. I'd give it if it was my last penny, for I can help in no other way; and if I need money, I can always earn it, thank God!" said Christie, as Hepsey hesitated to take so much from a fellow-worker.

The thought of that investment lay warm at Christie's heart, and never woke a regret, for well she knew that every dollar of it would be blessed, since shares in the Underground Railroad pay splendid dividends that never fail.

Another portion of her fortune, as she called Harry's gift, was bestowed in wedding presents upon Lucy, who at length succeeded in winning the heart of the owner of the "heavenly eyes" and "distracting legs;" and

having gained her point, married him with dramatic celerity and went West to follow the fortunes of her lord.

The old theatre was to be demolished and the company scattered, so a farewell festival was held, and Christie went to it, feeling more solitary than ever as she bade her old friends a long good-bye.

The rest of the money burned in her pocket, but she prudently put it by for a rainy day, and fell to work again when her brief vacation was over.

Hearing of a chance for a good needlewoman in a large and well-conducted mantua-making establishment, she secured it as a temporary thing; for she wanted to divert her mind from that last sad experience by entirely different employment and surroundings. She liked to return at night to her own little home, solitary and simple as it was, and felt a great repugnance to accept any place where she would be mixed up with family affairs again.

So day after day she went to her seat in the work-room where a dozen other young

women sat sewing busily on gay garments, with as much lively gossip to beguile the time as Miss Cotton, the forewoman, would allow.

For a while it diverted Christie, as she had a feminine love for pretty things, and enjoyed seeing delicate silks, costly lace, and all the indescribable fantasies of fashion. But as spring came on, the old desire for something fresh and free began to haunt her, and she had both waking and sleeping dreams of a home in the country somewhere, with cows and flowers, clothes bleaching on green grass, bob-o'-links making rapturous music by the river, and the smell of new-mown hay, all lending their charms to the picture she painted for herself.

Most assuredly she would have gone to find these things, led by the instincts of a healthful nature, had not one slender tie held her till it grew into a bond so strong she could not break it.

Among her companions was one, and one only, who attracted her. The others were well-meaning girls, but full of the frivolous

purposes and pleasures which their tastes prompted and their dull life fostered. Dress, gossip, and wages were the three topics which absorbed them. Christie soon tired of the innumerable changes rung upon these themes, and took refuge in her own thoughts, soon learned to enjoy them undisturbed by the clack of many tongues about her. Her evenings at home were devoted to books, for she had the true New England woman's desire for education, and read or studied for the love of it. Thus she had much to think of as her needle flew, and was rapidly becoming a sort of sewing-machine when life was brightened for her by the finding of a friend.

Among the girls was one quiet, skilful creature, whose black dress, peculiar face, and silent ways attracted Christie. Her evident desire to be let alone amused the new-comer at first, and she made no effort to know her. But presently she became aware that Rachel watched her with covert interest, stealing quick, sly glances at her as she sat musing over her work. Christie smiled at her when she caught these glances,

as if to reassure the looker of her good-will. But Rachel only coloured, kept her eyes fixed on her work, and was more reserved than ever.

This interested Christie, and she fell to studying this young woman with some curiosity, for she was different from the others. Though evidently younger than she looked, Rachel's face was that of one who had known some great sorrow, some deep experience; for there were lines on the forehead that contrasted strongly with the bright, abundant hair above it; in repose, the youthful, red, soft lips had a mournful droop, and the eyes were old with that indescribable expression which comes to those who count their lives by emotions, not by years.

Strangely haunting eyes to Christie, for they seemed to appeal to her with a mute eloquence she could not resist. In vain did Rachel answer her with quiet coldness, nod silently when she wished her a cheery "good morning," and keep resolutely in her own somewhat isolated corner, though invited to share the sunny window where the other sat.

Her eyes belied her words, and those fugitive glances betrayed the longing of a lonely heart, that dared not yield itself to the genial companionship so freely offered it.

Christie was sure of this, and would not be repulsed; for her own heart was very solitary. She missed Helen, and longed to fill the empty place. She wooed this shy, cold girl as patiently and as gently as a lover might, determined to win her confidence because all the others had failed to do it. Sometimes she left a flower in Rachel's basket, always smiled and nodded as she entered, and often stopped to admire the work of her tasteful fingers. It was impossible to resist such friendly overtures, and slowly Rachel's coldness melted; into the beseeching eyes came a look of gratitude, the more touching for its wordlessness, and an irrepressible smile broke over her face in answer to the cordial ones that made the sunshine of her day.

Emboldened by these demonstrations Christie changed her seat, and quietly established between them a daily interchange of some-

thing besides needles, pins, and spools. Then, as Rachel did not draw back offended, she went a step farther; and one day, when they chanced to be left alone to finish off a delicate bit of work, she spoke out frankly,—

"Why can't we be friends? I want one sadly, and so do you, unless your looks deceive me. We both seem to be alone in the world, to have had trouble, and to like one another. I won't annoy you by any impertinent curiosity, nor burden you with uninteresting confidences; I only want to feel that you like me a little and don't mind my liking you a great deal. Will you be my friend, and let me be yours?"

A great tear rolled down upon the shining silk in Rachel's hands as she looked into Christie's earnest face, and answered with an almost passionate gratitude in her own,—

"You can never need a friend as much as I do, or know what a blessed thing it is to find such a one as you are."

"Then I may love you, and not be afraid of offending?" cried Christie, much touched.

"Yes. But remember *I* didn't ask it

first," said Rachel, half dropping the hand she had held in both her own.

"You proud creature! I'll remember, and when we quarrel I'll take all the blame upon myself."

Then Christie kissed her warmly, whisked away the tear, and began to paint the delights in store for them in her most enthusiastic way, being much elated with her victory; while Rachel listened with a newly-kindled light in her lovely eyes, and a smile that showed how winsome her face had been before many tears washed its bloom away, and much trouble made it old too soon.

Christie kept her word—asked no questions, volunteered no confidences, but heartily enjoyed the new friendship, and found that it gave to life the zest which it had lacked before. Now some one cared for her, and, better still, she could make some one happy; and in the act of lavishing the affection of her generous nature on a creature sadder and more solitary than herself, she found a satisfaction that never lost its charm. There was

nothing in her possession that she did not offer Rachel, from the whole of her heart to the larger half of her little room.

"I'm tired of thinking only of myself. It makes me selfish and low-spirited, for I'm not a bit interesting. I must love somebody, and 'love them hard,' as children say; so why can't you come and stay with me? There's room enough, and we could be so cosy of evenings with our books and work. I know you need some one to look after you, and I love dearly to take care of people. Do come," she would say, with most persuasive hospitality.

But Rachel always answered steadily,—"Not yet, Christie, not yet. I've got something to do before I can think of doing anything so beautiful as that. Only love me, dear, and some day I'll show you all my heart, and thank you as I ought."

So Christie was content to wait, and meantime enjoyed much; for with Rachel as a friend she ceased to care for country pleasures, found happiness in the work that gave her better food than mere daily bread,

and never thought of change; for love can make a home for itself anywhere.

A very bright and happy time was this in Christie's life; but, like most happy times, it was very brief. Only one summer allowed for the blossoming of the friendship that budded so slowly in the spring; then the frost came and killed the flowers, but the root lived long underneath the snows of suffering, doubt, and absence.

Coming to her work late one morning, she found the usually orderly room in confusion. Some of the girls were crying, some whispering together, all looking excited and dismayed. Mrs. King sat majestically at her table, with an ominous frown upon her face. Miss Cotton stood beside her, looking unusually sour and stern, for the ancient virgin's temper was not one of the best. Alone, before them all, with her face hidden in her hands, and despair in every line of her drooping figure, stood Rachel—a meek culprit at the stern bar of justice where women try a sister woman.

"What's the matter?" cried Christie, pausing on the threshold.

Rachel shivered, as if the sound of that familiar voice was a fresh wound, but she did not lift her head; and Mrs. King answered, with a nervous emphasis that made the bugles of her head-dress rattle dismally,—

"A very sad thing, Miss Devon—*very* sad, indeed; a thing which *never* occurred in my establishment before, and *never* shall again. It appears that Rachel, whom we all considered a most respectable and worthy girl, has been quite the reverse. I shudder to think what the consequences of my taking her without a character (a thing I never do, and was only tempted by her superior taste as a trimmer) might have been if Miss Cotton, having suspicions, had not made strict inquiry and confirmed them."

"That was a kind and generous act, and Miss Cotton must feel proud of it," said Christie, with an indignant recollection of Mr. Fletcher's "cautious inquiries" about herself.

"It was perfectly right and proper, Miss Devon; and I thank her for her care of my interests." And Mrs. King bowed her acknowledgment of the service with a perfect

castanet accompaniment, whereat Miss Cotton bridled with malicious complacency.

"Mrs. King, are you sure of this?" said Christie. "Miss Cotton does not like Rachel because her work is so much praised. May not her jealousy make her unjust, or her zeal for you mislead her?"

"I thank you for your polite insinuations, miss," returned the irate forewoman. "*I* never make mistakes; but you will find that *you* have made a very great one in choosing Rachel for your bosom friend, instead of some one who would be a credit to you. Ask the creature herself if all I've said of her isn't true. She can't deny it."

With the same indefinable misgiving which had held her aloof, Christie turned to Rachel, lifted up the hidden face with gentle force, and looked into it imploringly, as she whispered, "Is it true?"

The woful countenance she saw made any other answer needless. Involuntarily her hands fell away, and she hid her own face, uttering the one reproach, which, tender and tearful though it was, seemed harder to

be borne than the stern condemnation gone before,—

"Oh, Rachel, I so loved and trusted you!"

The grief, affection, and regret that trembled in her voice, roused Rachel from her state of passive endurance and gave her courage to plead for herself. But it was Christie whom she addressed, Christie whose pardon she implored, Christie's sorrowful reproach that she most keenly felt.

"Yes, it *is* true," she said, looking only at the woman who had been the first to befriend, and now was the last to desert her. "It is true that I once went astray, but God knows I have repented; that for years I've tried to be an honest girl again, and that but for this help I should be a far sadder creature than I am this day. Christie, you can never know how bitter hard it is to outlive a sin like mine, and struggle up again from such a fall. It clings to me; it won't be shaken off or buried out of sight. No sooner do I find a safe place like this, and try to forget the past, than some one reads my secret in

my face and hunts me down. It seems very cruel, very hard, yet it is my punishment, so I try to bear it, and begin again. What hurts me now more than all the rest, what breaks my heart, is that I deceived *you*. I never meant to do it. I did not seek you, did I? I tried to be cold and stiff; never asked for love, though starving for it, till you came to me, so kind, so generous, so dear—how could I help it? Oh, how could I help it then?"

Christie had watched Rachel while she spoke, and spoke to her alone; her heart yearned towards this one friend, for she still loved her, and loving, she believed in her.

"I don't reproach you, dear; I don't despise or desert you, and though I'm grieved and disappointed, I'll stand by you still, because you need me more than ever now, and I want to prove that I am a true friend. Mrs. King, please forgive, and let poor Rachel stay here, safe among us."

"Miss Devon, I'm surprised at you! By no means; it would be the ruin of my esta-

blishment; not a girl would remain, and the character of my rooms would be lost for ever," replied Mrs. King, goaded on by the relentless Cotton.

"But where will she go if you send her away? Who will employ her if you inform against her? What stranger will believe in her if we, who have known her so long, fail to befriend her now? Mrs. King, think of your own daughters, and be a mother to this poor girl for their sake."

That last stroke touched the woman's heart; her cold eye softened, her hard mouth relaxed, and pity was about to win the day, when prudence, in the shape of Miss Cotton, turned the scale, for that spiteful spinster suddenly cried out, in a burst of righteous wrath,—

"If that hussy stays, *I* leave this establishment for ever!" and followed up the blow by putting on her bonnet with a flourish.

At this spectacle, self-interest got the better of sympathy in Mrs. King's worldly mind. To lose Cotton was to lose her right

hand, and charity at that price was too expensive a luxury to be indulged in; so she hardened her heart, composed her features, and said impressively,—

"Take off your bonnet, Cotton; I have no intention of offending you, or any one else, by such a step. I forgive you, Rachel, and I pity you; but I can't think of allowing you to stay. There are proper institutions for such as you, and I advise you to go to one, and repent. You were paid Saturday night, so nothing prevents your leaving at once. Time is money here, and we are wasting it. Young ladies, take your seats."

All but Christie obeyed, yet no one touched a needle, and Mrs. King sat hurriedly stabbing pins into the fat cushion on her breast, as if testing the hardness of her heart.

Rachel's eye went round the room; saw pity, aversion, or contempt on every face, but met no answering glance, for even Christie's eyes were bent thoughtfully on the ground, and Christie's heart seemed closed against her. As she looked her whole manner changed; her tears ceased to fall, her face

grew hard, and a reckless mood seemed to take possession of her, as if finding herself deserted by womankind, she would desert her own womanhood.

"I might have known it would be so," she said abruptly, with a bitter smile, sadder to see than her most hopeless tears. "It's no use for such as me to try; better go back to the old life, for there are kinder hearts among the sinners than among the saints, and no one can live without a bit of love. Your Magdalen Asylums are penitentiaries, not homes; I won't go to any of them. Your piety isn't worth much, for though you read in your Bible how the Lord treated a poor soul like me, yet when I stretch out my hand to you for help, not one of all you virtuous, Christian women, dare take it and keep me from a life that's worse than hell."

As she spoke Rachel flung out her hand with a half-defiant gesture, and Christie took it. That touch, full of womanly compassion, seemed to exorcize the desperate spirit that possessed the poor girl in her despair, for, with a stifled exclamation, she sank down at

Christie's feet, and lay there weeping in all the passionate abandonment of love and gratitude, remorse and shame. Never had human voice sounded so heavenly sweet to her as that which broke the silence of the room as this one friend said, with the earnestness of a true and tender heart,—

"Mrs. King, if you send her away, I must take her in; for if she does go back to the old life, the sin of it will lie at our door, and God will remember it against us in the end. Some one must trust her, help her, love her, and so save her, as nothing else will. Perhaps I can do this better than you—at least, I'll try; for even if I risk the loss of my good name, I could bear that better than the thought that Rachel had lost the work of these hard years for want of upholding now. She shall come home with me; no one there need know of this discovery, and I will take any work to her that you will give me, to keep her from want and its temptations. Will you do this, and let me sew for less, if I can pay you for the kindness in no other way?"

Poor Mrs. King was "much tumbled up and

lown in her own mind;" she longed to consent, but Cotton's eye was upon her, and Cotton's departure would be an irreparable loss, so she decided to end the matter in the most summary manner. Plunging a particularly large pin into her cushioned breast, as if it was a relief to inflict that mock torture upon herself, she said sharply,—

"It is impossible. You can do as you please, Miss Devon, but I prefer to wash my hands of the affair at once and entirely."

Christie's eye went from the figure at her feet to the hard-featured woman who had been a kind and just mistress until now, and she asked anxiously,—

"Do you mean that you wash your hands of me also, if I stand by Rachel?"

"I do. I'm very sorry, but my young ladies *must* keep respectable company, or leave my service," was the brief reply, for Mrs. King grew grimmer externally as the mental rebellion increased internally.

"Then I *will* leave it!" cried Christie, with an indignant voice and eye. "Come, dear, we'll go together." And without a

look or word for any in the room, she raised the prostrate girl, and led her out into the little hall.

There she essayed to comfort her, but before many words had passed her lips Rachel looked up, and she was silent with surprise, for the face she saw was neither despairing nor defiant, but beautifully sweet and clear, as the unfallen spirit of the woman shone through the grateful eyes, and blessed her for her loyalty.

"Christie, you have done enough for me," she said. "Go back, and keep the good place you need, for such are hard to find. I can get on alone; I'm used to this, and the pain will soon be over."

"I'll not go back!" cried Christie hotly. "I'll do slop-work and starve, before I'll stay with such a narrow-minded, cold-hearted woman. Come home with me at once, and let us lay our plans together."

"No, dear; if I wouldn't go when you first asked me, much less will I go now, for I've done you harm enough already. I never can thank you for your great goodness to me,

never tell you what it has been to me. We must part now; but some day I'll come back, and show you that I've not forgotten how you loved and helped and trusted me, when all the others cast me off."

Vain were Christie's arguments and appeals. Rachel was immovable, and all her friend could win from her was a promise to send word, now and then, how things prospered with her.

"And, Rachel, I charge you to come to me in any strait, no matter what it is, no matter where I am; for if anything could break my heart, it would be to know that you had gone back to the old life, because there was no one to help and hold you up."

"I *never* can go back; you have saved me, Christie, for you love me, you have faith in me, and that will keep me strong and safe when you are gone. Oh, my dear, my dear, God bless you for ever and for ever!"

Then Christie, remembering only that they were two loving women, alone in the world of sin and sorrow, took Rachel in her arms, kissed and cried over her with sisterly affection,

and watched her prayerfully, as she went away to begin her hard task anew, with nothing but the touch of innocent lips upon her cheek, the baptism of tender tears upon her forehead to keep her from despair.

Still cherishing the hope that Rachel would come back to her, Christie neither returned to Mrs. King, nor sought another place of any sort, but took home work from a larger establishment, and sat sewing diligently in her little room, waiting, hoping, longing for her friend. But month after month went by, and no word, no sign came to comfort her. She would not doubt, yet she could not help fearing, and in her nightly prayer no petition was more fervently made than that which asked the Father of both saint and sinner to keep poor Rachel safe, and bring her back in His good time.

Never had she been so lonely as now, for Christie had a social heart, and having known the joy of a cordial friendship even for a little while, life seemed very barren to her when she lost it. No new friend took Rachel's place, for none came to her, and a feeling of

loyalty kept her from seeking one. But she suffered for the want of genial society, for all the tenderness of her nature seemed to have been roused by that brief but most sincere affection. Her hungry heart clamoured for the happiness that was its right, and grew very heavy as she watched friends or lovers walking in the summer twilight when she took her evening stroll. Often her eyes followed some humble pair, longing to bless and to be blessed by the divine passion whose magic beautifies the little milliner and her lad with the same tender grace as the poet and the mistress whom he makes immortal in a song. But neither friend nor lover came to Christie, and she said to herself, with a sad sort of courage,—

"I shall be solitary all my life, perhaps; so the sooner I make up my mind to it, the easier it will be to bear."

At Christmas-tide she made a little festival for herself, by giving to each of the household drudges the most generous gift she could afford, for no one else thought of them, and having known some of the hardships of servi-

tude herself, she had much sympathy with those in like case.

Then, with the pleasant recollection of two plain faces brightened by gratitude, surprise, and joy, she went out into the busy streets, to forget the solitude she left behind her.

Very gay they were with the snow and sleigh-bells, holly-boughs, and garlands below, and Christmas sunshine in the winter sky above. All faces shone, all voices had a cheery ring, and everybody stepped briskly on errands of good-will. Up and down went Christie, making herself happy in the happiness of others. Looking in at the shop-windows, she watched with interest the purchases of busy parents, calculating how best to fill the little socks hung up at home, with a childish faith that never must be disappointed, no matter how hard the times might be. She was glad to see so many turkeys on their way to garnish hospitable tables, and hoped that all the dear home circles might be found unbroken, though she had place in none. No Christmas-tree went

by, leaving a whiff of piney sweetness behind, that she did not wish it all success, and picture to herself the merry little people dancing in its light. And whenever she saw a ragged child eyeing a window full of goodies, smiling even while it shivered, she could not resist playing Santa Claus till her purse was empty, sending the poor little souls enraptured home with oranges and apples in either hand, and splendid sweeties in their pockets for the babies.

No envy mingled with the melancholy that would not be dispelled even by these gentle acts, for her heart was very tender that night, and if any one had asked what gifts she desired most, she would have answered with a look more pathetic than any shivering child had given her,—

"I want the sound of a loving voice, the touch of a friendly hand."

Going home, at last, to the lonely little room where no Christmas fire burned, no tree shone, no household group awaited her, she climbed the long, dark stairs, with drops on her cheeks, warmer than any melted snow-

flake could have left, and, opening her door, paused on the threshold, smiling with wonder and delight, for in her absence some gentle spirit *had* remembered her. A fire burned cheerily upon the hearth, her lamp was lighted, a lovely rose-tree, in full bloom, filled the air with its delicate breath, and in its shadow lay a note from Rachel.

"A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, Christie! Long ago you gave me your little rose; I have watched and tended it for your sake, dear, and now, when I want to show my love and thankfulness, I give it back again as my one treasure. I crept in while you were gone, because I feared I might harm you in some way if you saw me. I longed to stay and tell you that I am safe and well and busy, with your good face looking into mine, but I don't deserve that yet. Only love me, trust me, pray for me, and some day you shall know what you have done for me. Till then, God bless and keep you, dearest friend.

"Your Rachel."

Never had sweeter tears fallen than those that dropped upon the little tree as Christie

took it in her arms, and all the rosy clusters leaned towards her as if eager to deliver tender messages. Surely her wish was granted now, for friendly hands had been at work for her. Warm against her heart lay words as precious as if uttered by a loving voice, and nowhere, on that happy night, stood a fairer Christmas-tree than that which bloomed so beautifully from the heart of a Magdalen who loved much and was forgiven.

CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH THE MIST.

THE year that followed was the saddest Christie had ever known, for she suffered a sort of poverty which is more difficult to bear than actual want, since money cannot lighten it, and the rarest charity alone can minister to it. Her heart was empty and she could not fill it; her soul was hungry and she could not feed it; life was cold and dark and she could not warm and brighten it, for she knew not where to go.

She tried to help herself by all the means in her power, and when effort after effort failed she said, "I am not good enough yet to deserve happiness. I think too much of human love, too little of divine. When I have made God my friend perhaps He will

let me find and keep one heart to make life happy with. How shall I know God? Who will tell me where to find Him, and help me to love and lean upon Him as I ought?"

In all sincerity she asked these questions, in all sincerity she began her search, and with pathetic patience waited for an answer. She read many books, some wise, some vague, some full of superstition, all unsatisfactory to one who wanted a living God. She went to many churches, studied many creeds, and watched their fruits as well as she could, but still remained unsatisfied. Some were cold and narrow, some seemed theatrical and superficial, some stern and terrible, none simple, sweet, and strong enough for humanity's many needs. There was too much machinery, too many walls, laws, and penalties between the Father and His children. Too much fear, too little love; too many saints and intercessors; too little faith in the instincts of the soul which turns to God as flowers to the sun. Too much idle strife about names and creeds; too little knowledge of the natural religion which has no name but godliness, whose creed

is boundless and benignant as the sunshine, whose faith is as the tender trust of little children in their mother's love.

Nowhere did Christie find this all-sustaining power, this paternal friend and comforter, and after months of patient searching she gave up her quest, saying despondently,—

"I'm afraid I never shall get religion, for all that's offered me seems so poor, so narrow, or so hard that I cannot take it for my stay. A God of wrath I cannot love; a God that must be propitiated, adorned, and adored like an idol, I cannot respect; and a God who can be blinded to men's iniquities through the week by a little beating of the breast and bowing down on the seventh day, I cannot serve. I want a Father to whom I can go with all my sins and sorrows, all my hopes and joys, as freely and fearlessly as I used to go to my human father, sure of help and sympathy and love. Shall I ever find Him?"

Alas, poor Christie! she was going through the sorrowful perplexity that comes to so many before they learn that religion cannot be given or bought, but must grow as trees grow,

needing frost and snow, rain and wind to strengthen it before it is deep-rooted in the soul; that God is in the hearts of all, and they that seek shall surely find Him when they need Him most.

So Christie waited for religion to reveal itself to her, and while she waited worked with an almost desperate industry, trying to buy a little happiness for herself by giving a part of her earnings to those whose needs money could supply. She clung to her little room, for there she could live her own life undisturbed, and preferred to stint herself in other ways rather than give up this liberty. Day after day she sat there sewing health of mind and body into the long seams or dainty stitching that passed through her busy hands, and while she sewed she thought sad, bitter, oftentimes rebellious thoughts.

It was the worst life she could have led just then, for, deprived of the active, cheerful influences she most needed, her mind preyed on itself, slowly and surely, preparing her for the dark experience to come. She knew that there was fitter work for her somewhere, but

how to find it was a problem which wiser women have often failed to solve. She was no pauper, yet was one of those whom poverty sets at odds with the world, for favours burden, and dependence makes the bread bitter, unless love brightens the one and sweetens the other.

There are many Christies, willing to work, yet unable to bear the contact with coarser natures which makes labour seem degrading, or to endure the hard struggle for the bare necessities of life when life has lost all that makes it beautiful. People wonder when such as she say they can find little to do; but to those who know nothing of the pangs of pride, the sacrifices of feeling, the martyrdoms of youth, love, hope, and ambition that go on under the faded cloaks of these poor gentlewomen, who tell them to go into factories, or scrub in kitchens, for there is work enough for all, the most convincing answer would be "Try it."

Christie kept up bravely till a wearisome low fever broke both strength and spirit, and brought the weight of debt upon her when

least fitted to bear or cast it off. For the first time she began to feel that she had nerves which would rebel, and a heart that could not long endure isolation from its kind without losing the cheerful courage which hitherto had been her staunchest friend. Perfect rest, kind care, and genial society were the medicines she needed, but there was no one to minister to her, and she went blindly on along the road so many women tread.

She left her bed too soon, fearing to ask too much of the busy people who had done their best to be neighbourly. She returned to her work when it felt heavy in her feeble hands, for debt made idleness seem wicked to her conscientious mind. And, worst of all, she fell back into the bitter, brooding mood which had become habitual to her since she lived alone. While the tired hands slowly worked, the weary brain ached and burned with heavy thoughts, vain longings, and feverish fancies, till things about her sometimes seemed as strange and spectral as the phantoms that had haunted her half-delirious sleep. Inexpressibly wretched were the dreary days, the rest-

less nights, with only pain and labour for companions. The world looked very dark to her, life seemed an utter failure, God a delusion, and the long, lonely years before her too hard to be endured.

It is not always want, insanity, or sin that drives women to desperate deaths; often it is a dreadful loneliness of heart, a hunger for home and friends, worse than starvation, a bitter sense of wrong in being denied the tender ties, the pleasant duties, the sweet rewards that can make the humblest life happy; a rebellious protest against God, who, when they cry for bread, seems to offer them a stone. Some of these impatient souls throw life away, and learn too late how rich it might have been with a stronger faith, a more submissive spirit. Others are kept, and slowly taught to stand and wait, till blest with a happiness the sweeter for the doubt that went before.

There came a time to Christie when the mist about her was so thick she would have stumbled and fallen had not the little candle, kept alight by her own hand, showed her how far "a good deed shines in a naughty

world;" and when God seemed utterly forgetful of her He sent a friend to save and comfort her.

March winds were whistling among the house-tops, and the sky was darkening with a rainy twilight as Christie folded up her finished work, stretched her weary limbs, and made ready for her daily walk. Even this was turned to profit, for then she took home her work, went in search of more, and did her own small marketing. As late hours and unhealthy labour destroyed appetite, and unpaid debts made each mouthful difficult to swallow with Mrs. Flint's hard eye upon her, she had undertaken to supply her own food, and so lessen the obligation that burdened her. An unwise retrenchment, for, busied with the tasks that must be done, she too often neglected or deferred the meals to which no society lent interest, no appetite gave flavour; and when the fuel was withheld the fire began to die out spark by spark.

As she stood before the little mirror, smoothing the hair upon her forehead, she watched the face reflected there, wondering if

it could be the same she used to see so full of youth and hope and energy.

"Yes, I'm growing old; my youth is nearly over, and at thirty I shall be a faded, dreary woman, like so many I see and pity. It's hard to come to this after trying so long to find my place, and do my duty. I'm a failure after all, and might as well have stayed with Aunt Betsey or married Joe."

"Miss Devon, to-day is Saturday, and I'm makin' up my bills, so I'll trouble you for your month's board, and as much on the old account as you can let me have."

Mrs. Flint spoke, and her sharp voice rasped the silence like a file, for she had entered without knocking, and her demand was the first intimation of her presence.

Christie turned slowly round, for there was no elasticity in her motions now; through the melancholy anxiety her face always wore of late there came the worried look of one driven almost beyond endurance, and her hands began to tremble nervously as she tied on her bonnet. Mrs. Flint was a hard woman, and dunned her debtors relentlessly;

Christie dreaded the sight of her, and would have left the house had she been free of debt.

"I am just going to take these things home and get more work. I am sure of being paid, and you shall have all I get. But, for Heaven's sake! give me time."

Two days and a night of almost uninterrupted labour had given a severe strain to her nerves, and left her in a dangerous state. Something in her face arrested Mrs. Flint's attention; she observed that Christie was putting on her best cloak and hat, and to her suspicious eye the bundle of work looked unduly large.

It had been a hard day for the poor woman; for the cook had gone off in a huff, the chamber girl been detected in petty larceny, two desirable boarders had disappointed her, and the incapable husband had fallen ill; so it was little wonder that her soul was tried, her sharp voice sharper, and her sour temper sourer than ever.

"I *have* heard of folks putting on their best things and going out, but never coming back again, when they owed money. It's a mean

trick, but it's sometimes done by them you wouldn't think it of," she said, with an aggravating sniff of intelligence.

To be suspected of dishonesty was the last drop in Christie's full cup. She looked at the woman with a strong desire to do something violent, for every nerve was tingling with irritation and anger. But she controlled herself, though her face was colourless and her hands were more tremulous than before. Unfastening her comfortable cloak, she replaced it with a shabby shawl, took off her neat bonnet and put on a hood, unfolded six linen shirts and shook them out before her landlady's eyes, then retied the parcel, and, pausing on the threshold of the door, looked back with an expression that haunted the woman long afterwards as she said, with the quiver of strong excitement in her voice,—

"Mrs. Flint, I have always dealt honourably by you; I always mean to do it, and don't deserve to be suspected of dishonesty like that. I leave everything I own behind me, and if I don't come back, you can sell them all and pay yourself, for I feel now as

if I *never* wanted to see you or this room again."

Then she went rapidly away, supported by her indignation, for she had done her best to pay her debts, had sold the few trinkets she possessed, and several treasures given by the Carrols, to settle her doctor's bill, and had been half killing herself to satisfy Mrs. Flint's demands. The consciousness that she had been too lavish in her generosity when fortune smiled upon her made the present want all the harder to bear. But she would neither beg nor borrow, though she knew Harry would delight to give, and Uncle Enos lend her money, with a lecture on extravagance, gratis.

"I'll paddle my own canoe as long as I can," she said sternly, "and when I must ask help I'll turn to strangers for it, or scuttle my boat and go down without troubling any one."

When she came to her employer's door, the servant said "Missis was out;" then, seeing Christie's disappointed face, she added confidentially,—

"If it's any comfort to know it, I can tell you that missis wouldn't have paid you if she had a been to home. There's been three other women here with work, and she's put 'em all off. She always does, and beats 'em down into the bargain, which ain't genteel to my thinkin'."

"She promised me I should be well paid for these, because I undertook to get them done without fail. I've worked day and night rather than disappoint her, and felt sure of my money," said Christie despondently.

"I'm sorry, but you won't get it. She told me to tell you your prices was too high, and she could find folks to work cheaper."

"She did not object to the price when I took the work, and I have half-ruined my eyes over the fine stitching. See if it isn't nicely done." And Christie displayed her exquisite needlework with pride.

The girl admired it, and, having a grievance of her own, took satisfaction in berating her mistress.

"It's a shame! These things are part of a present the ladies are going to give the minis-

ter; but I don't believe he'll feel easy in 'em if poor folks is wronged to get 'em. Missis won't pay what they are worth, I know; for, don't you see, the cheaper the work is done the more money she has to make a spread with her share of the present? It's my opinion you'd better hold on to these shirts till she pays for 'em handsome."

"No; I'll keep *my* promise, and I hope she will keep hers. Tell her I need the money very much, and have worked very hard to please her. I'll come again on Monday, if I'm able."

Christie's lips trembled as she spoke, for she was feeble still, and the thought of that hard-earned money had been her sustaining hope through the weary hours spent over that ill-paid work. The girl said "Good-bye" with a look of mingled pity and respect, for in her eyes the seamstress was more of a lady than the mistress in this transaction.

Christie hurried to another place, and asked eagerly if the young ladies had any work for her. "Not a stitch," was the reply, and the door closed. She stood a moment looking

down upon the passers-by, wondering what answer she would get if she accosted any one; and had any especially benevolent face looked back at her she would have been tempted to do it, so heart-sick and forlorn did she feel just then.

She knocked at several other doors, to receive the same reply. She even tried a slop-shop, but it was full, and her pale face was against her. Her long illness had lost her many patrons, and if one steps out from the ranks of needlewomen it is very hard to press in again, so crowded are they, and so desperate the need of money.

One hope remained, and though the way was long, and a foggy drizzle had set, she minded neither distance nor the chilly rain, but hurried away with anxious thoughts still dogging her steps. Across a long bridge, through muddy roads and up a stately avenue she went, pausing at last, spent and breathless, at another door.

A servant with a wedding-favour in his button-hole opened to her, and, while he went to deliver her urgent message, she peered in

wistfully from the dreary world without, catching glimpses of home-love and happiness that made her heart ache for very pity of its own loneliness.

A wedding was evidently afoot, for hall and staircase blazed with light and bloomed with flowers. Smiling men and maids ran to and fro; opening doors showed tables beautiful with bridal white and silver; savoury odours filled the air; gay voices echoed above and below; and once she caught a brief glance at the bonny bride, standing with her father's arm about her, while her mother gave some last loving touch to her array; and a group of young sisters with April faces clustered round her.

The pretty picture vanished all too soon; the man returned with a hurried "No" for answer, and Christie went out into the deepening twilight with a strange sense of desperation at her heart. It was not the refusal, not the fear of want, nor the reaction of overtaxed nerves alone; it was the sharpness of the contrast between that other woman's fate and her own that made her

wring her hands together and cry out bitterly,—

"Oh, it isn't fair, it isn't right that she should have so much and I so little! What have I ever done to be so desolate and miserable, and never to find any happiness, however hard I try to do what seems my duty?"

There was no answer, and she went slowly down the long avenue, feeling that there was no cause for hurry now, and even night and rain and wind were better than her lonely room or Mrs. Flint's complaints. Afar off the city lights shone faintly through the fog, like pale lamps seen in dreams; the damp air cooled her feverish cheeks; the road was dark and still, and she longed to lie down and rest among the sodden leaves.

When she reached the bridge she saw the draw was up, and a spectral ship was slowly passing through. With no desire to mingle in the crowd that waited on either side, she paused, and, leaning on the railing, let her thoughts wander where they would. As she stood there the heavy air seemed to clog her breath and wrap her in its chilly

arms. She felt as if the springs of life were running down, and presently would stop; for even when the old question, "What shall I do?" came haunting her, she no longer cared even to try to answer it, and had no feeling but one of utter weariness. She tried to shake off the strange mood that was stealing over her, but spent body and spent brain were not strong enough to obey her will, and, in spite of her efforts to control it, the impulse that had seized her grew more intense each moment.

"Why should I work and suffer any longer for myself alone?" she thought; "why wear out my life struggling for the bread I have no heart to eat? I am not wise enough to find my place, nor patient enough to wait until it comes to me. Better give up trying, and leave room for those who have something to live for."

Many a stronger soul has known a dark hour when the importunate wish has risen, that it were possible and right to lay down the burdens that oppress, the perplexities that harass, and hasten the coming of the

long sleep that needs no lullaby. Such an hour was this to Christie, for, as she stood there, that sorrowful bewilderment which we call despair came over her, and ruled her with a power she could not resist.

A flight of steps close by led to a lumber wharf, and, scarcely knowing why, she went down there, with a vague desire to sit still somewhere, and think her way out of the mist that seemed to obscure her mind. A single tall lamp shone at the farther end of the platform, and presently she found herself leaning her hot forehead against the iron pillar, while she watched with curious interest the black water rolling sluggishly below.

She knew it was no place for her, yet no one waited for her, no one would care if she stayed for ever, and, yielding to the perilous fascination that drew her there, she lingered with a heavy throbbing in her temples, and a troop of wild fancies whirling through her brain. Something white swept by below—only a broken oar—but she began to wonder how a human body would look floating through the night. It was an awesome

fancy; but it took possession of her, and, as it grew, her eyes dilated, her breath came fast, and her lips fell apart, for she seemed to see the phantom she had conjured up, and it wore the likeness of herself.

With an ominous chill creeping through her blood, and a growing tumult in her mind, she thought, "I *must* go," but still stood motionless, leaning over the wide gulf, eager to see where that dead thing would pass away. So plainly did she see it, so peaceful was the white face, so full of rest the folded hands, so strangely like and yet unlike herself, that she seemed to lose her identity, and wondered which was the real and which the imaginary Christie. Lower and lower she bent; looser and looser grew her hold upon the pillar; faster and faster beat the pulses in her temples, and the rush of some blind impulse was swiftly coming on, when a hand seized and caught her back.

For an instant everything grew black before her eyes, and the earth seemed to slip away from underneath her feet. Then she was herself again, and found that she was

sitting on a pile of lumber, with her head uncovered, and a woman's arm about her.

"Was I going to drown myself?" she asked slowly, with a fancy that she had been dreaming frightfully, and some one had wakened her.

"You were most gone; but I came in time, thank God! O Christie, don't you know me?"

Ah! no fear of that; for with one bewildered look, one glad cry of recognition, Christie found her friend again, and was gathered close to Rachel's heart.

"My dear, my dear, what drove you to it? Tell me all, and let me help you in your trouble, as you helped me in mine," she said, as she tenderly laid the poor white face upon her breast, and wrapped her shawl about the trembling figure clinging to her with such passionate delight.

"I have been ill; I worked too hard; I'm not myself to-night. I owe money. People disappoint and worry me; and I was so worn out, and weak, and wicked, I think I meant to take my life."

"No, dear; it was not you that meant to do it, but the weakness and the trouble that bewildered you. Forget it all, and rest a little, safe with me; then we'll talk again."

Rachel spoke soothingly, for Christie shivered and sighed as if her own thoughts frightened her. For a moment they sat silent, while the mist trailed its white shroud above them, as if death had paused to beckon a tired child away, but, finding her so gently cradled on a warm human heart, had relented and passed on, leaving no waif but the broken oar for the river to carry towards the sea.

"Tell me about yourself, Rachel. Where have you been so long? I've looked and waited for you ever since the second little note you sent me on last Christmas; but you never came."

"I've been away, dear heart, hard at work in another city, larger and wickeder than this. I tried to get work here, that I might be near you; but that cruel Cotton always found me out; and I was so afraid I should get desperate that I went away where I was not known. There it came into my mind to

do for others more wretched than I what you had done for me. God put the thought into my heart, and He helped me in my work, for it has prospered wonderfully. All this year I have been busy with it, and almost happy; for I felt that your love made me strong to do it, and that, in time, I might grow good enough to be your friend."

"See what I am, Rachel, and never say that any more!"

"Hush, my poor dear, and let me talk! You are not able to do anything but rest and listen: I knew how many poor souls went wrong when the devil tempted them; and I gave all my strength to saving those who were going the way I went. I had no fear, no shame to overcome, for I was one of them. They would listen to me, for I knew what I spoke; they could believe in salvation, for I was saved; they did not feel so outcast and forlorn when I told them you had taken me into your innocent arms, and loved me like a sister. With every one I helped my power increased, and I felt as if I had washed away a little of my own great sin. O Christie!

never think it's time to die till you are called; for the Lord leaves us till we have done our work, and never sends more sin and sorrow than we can bear and be the better for, if we hold fast by Him."

So beautiful and brave she looked, so full of strength and yet of meek submission was her voice, that Christie's heart was thrilled; for it was plain that Rachel had learned how to distil balm from the bitterness of life, and, groping in the mire to save lost souls, had found her own salvation from there.

"Show me how to grow pious, strong, and useful, as you are," she said. "I am all wrong, and feel as if I never could get right again, for I haven't energy enough to care what becomes of me."

"I know the state, Christie: I've been through it all! but when *I* stood where you stand now, there was no hand to pull me back, and I fell into a blacker river than this underneath our feet. Thank God, I came in time to save you from either death!"

"How did you find me?" asked Christie, when she had echoed in her heart the thanks-

giving that came with such fervour from the other's lips.

"I passed you on the bridge. I did not see your face, but you stood leaning there so wearily, and looking down into the water, as I used to look, that I wanted to speak, but did not; and I went on to comfort a poor girl who is dying yonder. Something turned me back, however; and when I saw you down here I knew why I was sent. You were almost gone, but I kept you; and when I had you in my arms I knew you, though it nearly broke my heart to find you here. Now, dear, come home."

"Home! ah, Rachel, I've got no home, and for want of one I shall be lost!"

The lament that broke from her was more pathetic than the tears that streamed down, hot and heavy, melting from her heart the frost of her despair. Her friend let her weep, knowing well the worth of tears, and while Christie sobbed herself quiet, Rachel took thought for her as tenderly as any mother.

When she had heard the story of Christie's

troubles, she stood up as if inspired with a happy thought, and, stretching both hands to her friend, said, with an air of cheerful assurance most comforting to see,—

"I'll take care of you; come with me, my poor Christie, and I'll give you a home, very humble, but honest and happy."

"With you, Rachel?"

"No, dear, I must go back to my work, and you are not fit for that. Neither must you go again to your own room, because for you it is haunted, and the worst place you could be in. You want change, and I'll give you one. It will seem queer at first, but it is a wholesome place, and just what you need."

"I'll do anything you tell me. I'm past thinking for myself to-night, and only want to be taken care of till I find strength and courage enough to stand alone," said Christie, rising slowly and looking about her with an aspect as helpless and hopeless as if the cloud of mist was a wall of iron.

Rachel put on her bonnet for her and wrapped her shawl about her, saying, in a tender voice, that warmed the other's heart,—

"Close by lives a dear, good woman who often befriends such as you and I. She will take you in without a question, and love to do it, for she is the most hospitable soul I know. Just tell her you want work, that I sent you, and there will be no trouble. Then, when you know her a little, confide in her, and you will never come to such a pass as this again. Keep up your heart, dear; I'll not leave you till you are safe."

So cheerily she spoke, so confident she looked, that the lost expression passed from Christie's face, and hand in hand they went away together—two types of the sad sisterhood standing on either shore of the dark river that is spanned by a Bridge of Sighs.

Rachel led her friend towards the city, and, coming to the mechanics' quarter, stopped before the door of a small, old house.

"Just knock, say 'Rachel sent me,' and you'll find yourself at home."

"Stay with me, or let me go with you. I can't lose you again, for I need you very much," pleaded Christie, clinging to her friend.

"Not so much as that poor girl dying all alone! She's waiting for me, and I must go. But I'll write soon; and remember, Christie, I shall feel as if I had only paid a very little of my debt if you go back to the sad old life, and lose your faith and hope again. God bless and keep you, and when we meet next time let me find a happier face than this."

Rachel kissed it with her heart on her lips, smiled her brave sweet smile, and vanished in the mist.

Pausing a moment to collect herself, Christie recollected that she had not asked the name of the new friend whose help she was about to ask. A little sign on the door caught her eye, and, bending down, she managed to read by the dim light of the street-lamp these words,—

"C. Wilkins, Clear-Starcher.
"Laces done up in the best style."

Too tired to care whether a laundress or a lady took her in, she knocked timidly, and, while she waited for an answer to her summons, stood listening to the noises within.

A swashing sound as of water was audible,

likewise a scuffling as of flying feet; some one clapped hands, and a voice said warningly, "Into your beds this instant minute, or I'll come to you! Andrew Jackson, give Gusty a boost; Ann Lizy, don't you tech Wash's feet to tickle 'em. Set pretty in the tub, Victory dear, while ma sees whose rappin'."

Then heavy footsteps approached, the door opened wide, and a large woman appeared, with fuzzy red hair, no front teeth, and a plump, clean face, brightly illuminated by the lamp she carried.

"If you please, Rachel sent me. She thought you might be able—"

Christie got no farther, for C. Wilkins put out a strong bare arm, still damp, and gently drew her in, saying, with the same motherly tone as when addressing her children, "Come right in, dear, and don't mind the clutter things is in. I'm givin' the children their Sat'day scrubbin', and they will slop and kite 'round, no matter ef I do spank 'em."

Talking all the way in such an easy, comfortable voice that Christie felt as if she must have heard it before, Mrs. Wilkins led her un-

expected guest into a small kitchen, smelling suggestively of soap-suds and warm flat-irons. In the middle of this apartment was a large tub; in the tub a chubby child sat, sucking a sponge and staring calmly at the new-comer with a pair of big blue eyes, while little drops shone in the yellow curls and on the rosy shoulders.

"How pretty!" cried Christie, seeing nothing else, and stopping short to admire this innocent little Venus rising from the sea.

"So she is! Ma's darlin' lamb! and ketchin' her death a cold this blessed minnit. Set right down, my dear, and tuck your wet feet into the oven. I'll have a dish o' tea for you in less 'n no time; and while it's drawin 'I'll clap Victory Adelaide into her bed."

Christie sank into a shabby but most hospitable old chair, dropped her bonnet on the floor, put her feet in the oven, and, leaning back, watched Mrs. Wilkins wipe the baby as if she had come for that especial purpose. As Rachel predicted, she found herself at home at once, and presently was startled to hear a laugh from her own lips when several chil-

dren in red and yellow flannel night-gowns darted like meteors across the open doorway of an adjoining room, with whoops and howls, bursts of laughter, and antics of all sorts.

How pleasant it was—that plain room, with no ornaments but the happy faces; no elegance, but cleanliness; no wealth, but hospitality and lots of love. This latter blessing gave the place its charm, for, though Mrs. Wilkins threatened to take her infants' noses off if they got out of bed again, or "put 'em in the kettle and bile 'em," they evidently knew no fear, but gambolled all the nearer to her for the threat; and she beamed upon them with such maternal tenderness and pride that her homely face grew beautiful in Christie's eyes.

When the baby was bundled up in a blanket and about to be set down before the stove to simmer a trifle before being put to bed, Christie held out her arms, saying with an irresistible longing in her eyes and voice,—

"Let me hold her! I love babies dearly,

and it seems as if it would do me more good than quarts of tea to cuddle her, if she'll let me."

"There now, that's real sensible; and mother's bird 'll set along with you as good as a kitten. Toast her tootsies wal, for she's croupy, and I have to be extra choice of her."

"How good it feels!" sighed Christie, half devouring the warm and rosy little bunch in her lap, while baby lay back luxuriously, spreading her pink toes to the pleasant warmth and smiling sleepily up in the hungry face that hung over her.

Mrs. Wilkins's quick eyes saw it all, and she said to herself, in the closet, as she cut bread and rattled down a cup and saucer,—

"That's what she wants, poor creeter; I'll let her have a right nice time, and warm and feed and chirk her up, and then I'll see what's to be done for her. She ain't one of the common sort, and goodness only knows what Rachel sent her here for. She's poor and sick, but she ain't bad. I can tell that by her face, and she's the sort I like to help. It's a

mercy I ain't eat my supper, so she can have that bit of meat and the pie."

Putting a tray on the little table, the good soul set forth all she had to give, and offered it with such hospitable warmth that Christie ate and drank with unaccustomed appetite, finishing off deliciously with a kiss from baby before she was borne away by her mother to the back bedroom, where peace soon reigned.

"Now let me tell you who I am, and how I came to you in such an unceremonious way," began Christie, when her hostess returned and found her warmed, refreshed, and composed by a woman's three best comforters —kind words, a baby, and a cup of tea.

"'Pears to me, dear, I wouldn't rile myself up by telling any werryments to-night, but git right warm inter bed, and have a good long sleep," said Mrs. Wilkins, without a ray of curiosity in her wholesome red face.

"But you don't know anything about me, and I may be the worst woman in the world," cried Christie, anxious to prove herself worthy of such confidence.

"I know that you want takin' care of,

child, or Rachel wouldn't a sent you. Ef I can help any one, I don't want no introduction; and ef you be the wust woman in the world (which you ain't), I wouldn't shet my door on you, for then you'd need a lift more 'n you do now."

Christie could only put out her hand, and mutely thank her new friend with full eyes.

"You're fairly tuckered out, you poor soul, so you jest come right up chamber and let me tuck you up, else you'll be down sick. It ain't a mite of inconvenience: the room is kep for company, and it's all ready, even to a clean night-cap. I'm goin' to clap this warm flat to your feet when you're fixed; it's amazin' comfortin' and keeps your head cool."

Up they went to a tidy little chamber, and Christie found herself laid down to rest none too soon, for she was quite worn out. Sleep began to steal over her the moment her head touched the pillow, in spite of the much beruffled cap which Mrs. Wilkins put on with visible pride in its stiffly crimped borders. She was dimly conscious of a kind hand

tucking her up, a comfortable voice purring over her, and, best of all, a motherly good-night kiss, then the weary world faded quite away and she was at rest.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CURE FOR DESPAIR.

WHEN Christie opened the eyes that had closed so wearily, afternoon sunshine streamed across the room, and seemed the herald of happier days. Refreshed by sleep, and comforted by grateful recollections of her kindly welcome, she lay tranquilly enjoying the friendly atmosphere about her, with so strong a feeling that a skilful hand had taken the rudder, that she felt very little anxiety or curiosity about the haven which was to receive her boat after this narrow escape from shipwreck.

Her eye wandered to and fro, and brightened as it went; for though a poor, plain room, it was as neat as hands could make it, and so glorified with sunshine that she thought it a

lovely place, in spite of the yellow paper with green cabbage roses on it, the gorgeous plaster statuary, on the mantelpiece, and the fragrance of dough-nuts which pervaded the air. Everything suggested home-life, humble but happy, and Christie's solitary heart warmed at the sights and sounds about her.

A half-open closet-door gave her glimpses of little frocks and jackets, stubby little shoes, and go-to-meeting hats all in a row. From below came up the sound of childish voices chattering, childish feet trotting to and fro, and childish laughter sounding sweetly through the sabbath stillness of the place. From a room near by, came the soothing creak of a rocking-chair, the rustle of a newspaper, and now and then a scrap of conversation, commonplace enough, but pleasant to hear, because so full of domestic love and confidence; and, as she listened, Christie pictured Mrs. Wilkins and her husband taking their rest together after the week's hard work was done.

"I wish I could stay here; it's so comfortable and home-like. I wonder if they wouldn't

let me have this room, and help me to find some better work than sewing? I'll get up and ask them," thought Christie, feeling an irresistible desire to stay, and strong repugnance to returning to the room she had left, for, as Rachel truly said, it *was* haunted for her.

When she opened the door to go down, Mrs. Wilkins bounced out of her rocking-chair, and hurried to meet her with a smiling face, saying all in one breath,—

"Good mornin', dear! Rested well, I hope? I'm proper glad to hear it. Now come right down and have your dinner. I kep it hot, for I couldn't bear to wake you up, you was sleepin' so beautiful."

"I was so worn out I slept like a baby, and feel like a new creature. It was so kind of you to take me in, and I'm so grateful I don't know how to show it," said Christie warmly, as her hostess ponderously descended the complaining stairs and ushered her into the tidy kitchen, from which tubs and flat irons were banished one day in the week.

"Lawful sakes, th' ain't nothing to be

grateful for, child, and you're heartily welcome to the little I done. We are country folks in our ways, though we be livin' in the city, and we have a reg'lar country dinner Sundays. Hope you'll relish it; my vittles is clean ef they ain't rich."

As she spoke, Mrs. Wilkins dished up baked beans, Indian-pudding, and brown bread enough for half a dozen. Christie was hungry now, and ate with an appetite that delighted the good lady, who vibrated between her guest and her children, shut up in the "settin'-room."

"Now please let me tell you all about myself, for I am afraid you think me something better than I am. If I ask help from you, it is right that you should know whom you are helping," said Christie, when the table was cleared and her hostess came and sat down beside her.

"Yes, my dear, free your mind, and then we'll fix things up right smart. Nothin' I like better, and Lisha says I have considerable of a knack that way," replied Mrs. Wilkins, with a smile, a nod, and an air of interest most reassuring.

So Christie told her story, won to entire confidence by the sympathetic face opposite, and the motherly pats so gently given by the big, rough hand that often met her own. When all was told, Christie said very earnestly,—

"I am ready to go to work to-morrow, and will do anything I can find, but I *should* love to stay here a little while, if I could; I do so dread to be alone. Is it possible? I mean to pay for my board of course, and help you besides, if you'll let me."

Mrs. Wilkins glowed with pleasure at this compliment, and, leaning towards Christie, looked into her face a moment in silence, as if to test the sincerity of the wish. In that moment Christie saw what steady, sagacious eyes the woman had; so clear, so honest that she looked through them into the great, warm heart below, and looking, forgot the fuzzy, red hair, the paucity of teeth, the faded gown, and felt only the attraction of a nature genuine and genial as the sunshine dancing on the kitchen floor.

Beautiful souls often get put into plain bodies, but they cannot be hidden, and have a

power all their own, the greater for the unconsciousness or the humility which gives it grace. Christie saw and felt this then, and when the homely woman spoke, listened to her with implicit confidence.

"My dear, I'd no more send you away now than I would my Adelaide, for you need looking after for a spell, most as much as she does. You've been thinkin' and broodin' too much, and sewin' yourself to death. We'll stop all that, and keep you so busy there won't be no time for the hypo. You're one of them that can't live alone without starvin' somehow, so I'm jest goin' to turn you in among them children to paster, so to speak. That's wholesome and fillin' for *you*, and goodness knows it will be a puffect charity to *me*, for I'm goin' to be dreadful drove with gettin' up curtins and all manner of things, as spring comes on. So it ain't no favour on my part, and you can take out your board in tendin' baby and putterin' over them little tykes."

"I should like it *so* much! But I forgot my debt to Mrs. Flint; perhaps she won't let me

go," said Christie, with an anxious cloud coming over her brightening face.

"Merciful, suz! don't you be werried about her. I'll see to her, and ef she acts ugly Lisha'll fetch her round; men can always settle such things better'n we can, and he's a dreadful smart man Lisha is. We'll go to-morrer and get your belongins, and then settle right down for a spell; and by-an'-by when you git a trifle more chipper, we'll find a nice place in the country some'rs. That's what you want; nothin' like green grass and woodsy smells to right folks up. When I was a gal, ef I got low in my mind, or riled in my temper, I jest went out and grubbed in the gardin, or made hay, or walked a good piece, and it fetched me round beautiful. Never failed; so I come to see that good fresh dirt is fust rate physic for folk's spirits as it is for wounds, as they tell on."

"That sounds sensible and pleasant, and I like it. Oh, it is *so* beautiful to feel that somebody cares for you a little bit, and you ain't one too many in the world," sighed Christie.

"Don't you never feel that agin, my dear.

What's the Lord for ef He ain't to hold on to in times of trouble. Faith ain't wuth much ef it's only lively in fair weather; you've got to believe hearty and stan' by the Lord through thick and thin, and He'll stan' by you as no one else begins to. I remember of havin' this bore in upon me by somethin' that happened to a man I knew. He got blowed up in a powder-mill, and when folks asked him what he thought when the bust come, he said, real sober and impressive: 'Wal, it come through me, like a flash, that I'd served the Lord as faithful as I knew how for a number a years, and I guessed He'd fetch me through somehow, and He did.' Sure enough the man warn't killed; I'm bound to confess he was shook dreadful, but his faith warn't."

Christie could not help smiling at the story, but she liked it, and sincerely wished she could imitate the hero of it in his piety, not his powder. She was about to say so when the sound of approaching steps announced the advent of her host. She had been rather impressed with the "smartness" of Lisha by his wife's praises, but when a

small, sallow, sickly looking man came in she changed her mind; for not even an immensely stiff collar, nor a pair of boots that seemed composed entirely of what the boys call "creak leather," could inspire her with confidence.

Without a particle of expression in his yellow face, Mr. Wilkins nodded to the stranger over the picket fence of his collar, lighted his pipe, and clumped away to enjoy his afternoon promenade without compromising himself by a single word.

His wife looked after him with an admiring gaze as she said,—

"Them boots is as good as an advertisement, for he made every stitch on 'em himself;" then she added, laughing like a girl: "It's redick'lus my bein' so proud of Lisha, but ef a woman ain't a right to think wal of her own husband, I should like to know who has!"

Christie was afraid that Mrs. Wilkins had seen her disappointment in her face, and tried, with wifely zeal, to defend her lord from even a disparaging thought. Wishing to atone for this transgression she was about to sing the praises of the wooden-faced Elisha, but was

spared any polite fibs by the appearance of a small girl who delivered an urgent message to the effect, that "Mis Plumly was down sick and wanted Mis Wilkins to run over and set a spell."

As the good lady hesitated with an involuntary glance at her guest, Christie said quickly,—

"Don't mind me; I'll take care of the house for you if you want to go. You may be sure I won't run off with the children or steal the spoons."

"I ain't a mite afraid of anybody wantin' to steal them little toads; and as for spoons, I ain't got a silver one to bless myself with," laughed Mrs. Wilkins. "I guess I will go, then, ef you don't mind, as it's only acrost the street. Like's not settin' quiet will be better for you'n talkin', for I'm a dreadful hand to gab when I git started. Tell Mis Plumly I'm a comin'."

Then, as the child ran off, the stout lady began to rummage in her closet, saying, as she rattled and slammed,—

"I'll jest take her a drawin' of tea and a

couple of nut-cakes: mebby she'll relish 'em, for I shouldn't wonder ef she hadn't had a mouthful this blessed day. She's dreadful slack at the best of times, but no one can much wonder, seein' she's got nine children, and is jest up from a rheumatic fever. I'm sure I never grudge a meal of vittles or a hand's turn to such as she is, though she does beat all for dependin' on her neighbours. I'm a thousand times obleeged. You needn't werry about the children, only don't let 'em git lost, or burnt, or pitch out a winder; and when it's done give 'em the patty-cake that's bakin' for 'em."

With which maternal orders Mrs. Wilkins assumed a sky-blue bonnet, and went beaming away with several dishes genteelly hidden under her purple shawl.

Being irresistibly attracted towards the children, Christie opened the door and took a survey of her responsibilities.

Six lively infants were congregated in the "settin'-room," and chaos seemed to have come again, for every sort of destructive amusement was in full operation. George

Washington, the eldest blossom, was shearing a resigned kitten; Gusty and Ann Eliza were concocting mud pies in the ashes; Adelaide Victoria was studying the structure of lamp-wicks; while Daniel Webster and Andrew Jackson were dragging one another in a clothes-basket, to the great detriment of the old carpet and still older chariot.

Thinking that some employment more suited to the day might be introduced, Christie soon made friends with these young persons, and, having rescued the kitten, banished the basket, lured the elder girls from their mud-piety, and quenched the curiosity of the Pickwickian Adelaide, she proposed teaching them some little hymns.

The idea was graciously received, and the class decorously seated in a row. But before a single verse was given out, Gusty, being of a housewifely turn of mind, suggested that the patty-cake might burn. Instant alarm pervaded the party, and a precipitate rush was made for the cooking-stove, where Christie proved by ocular demonstration that the cake showed no signs of baking, much less

of burning. The family pronounced themselves satisfied, after each member had poked a grimy little finger into the doughy delicacy, whereon one large raisin reposed in proud preeminence over the vulgar herd of caraways.

Order being with difficulty restored, Christie taught her flock an appropriate hymn, and was flattering herself that their youthful minds were receiving a devotional bent, when they volunteered a song, and incited thereunto by the irreverent Wash, burst forth with a gem from Mother Goose, closing with a smart skirmish of arms and legs that set all law and order at defiance.

Hoping to quell the insurrection Christie invited the breathless rioters to calm themselves by looking at the pictures in the big Bible. But, unfortunately, her explanations were so vivid that her audience were fired with a desire to enact some of the scenes pourtrayed, and no persuasions could keep them from playing Ark on the spot. The clothes-basket was elevated upon two chairs, and into it marched the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, to judge by the noise, and

all set sail, with Washington at the helm, Jackson and Webster plying the clothes and pudding-sticks for oars, while the young ladies rescued their dolls from the flood, and waved their hands to imaginary friends who were not unmindful of the courtesies of life even in the act of drowning.

Finding her authority defied, Christie left the rebels to their own devices, and sitting in a corner, began to think about her own affairs. But before she had time to get anxious or perplexed, the children diverted her mind, as if the little flibberty-gibbets knew that their pranks and perils were far wholesomer for her just then than brooding.

The much-enduring kitten being sent forth as a dove upon the waters, failed to return with the olive-branch; of which peaceful emblem there was soon great need, for mutiny broke out, and spread with disastrous rapidity.

Ann Eliza slapped Gusty because she had the biggest bandbox; Andrew threatened to "chuck" Daniel overboard if he continued to trample on the fraternal toes, and in the

midst of the fray, by some unguarded motion, Washington capsized the ship and precipitated the patriarchal family into the bosom of the deep.

Christie flew to the rescue, and, hydropathically treated, the anguish of bumps and bruises was soon assuaged. Then appeared the appropriate moment for a story, and gathering the dilapidated party about her, she soon enraptured them by a recital of the immortal history of "Frank and the little dog Trusty." Charmed with her success, she was about to tell another moral tale, but no sooner had she announced the name, "The Three Cakes," when, like an electric flash a sudden recollection seized the young Wilkinses, and with one voice they demanded their lawful prize, sure that now it must be done.

Christie had forgotten all about it, and was harassed with secret misgivings as she headed the investigating committee. With skipping of feet and clapping of hands the eager tribe surrounded the stove, and with fear and trembling Christie drew forth a melancholy cinder, where, like Casabianca, the lofty raisin

still remained, blackened, but undaunted, at its post.

Then were six little vials of wrath poured out upon her devoted head, and sounds of lamentation filled the air, for the irate Wilkinses refused to be comforted, till the rash vow to present each member of the outraged family with a private cake produced a lull, during which the younger ones were decoyed into the back yard, and the three elders solaced themselves with mischief.

Mounted on mettlesome broomsticks, Andrew and Daniel were riding merrily away to the Banbury Cross of blessed memory, and little Vic was erecting a pagoda of oyster shells, under Christie's superintendence, when a shrill scream from within sent horsemen and architects flying to the rescue.

Gusty's pinafore was in a blaze; Ann Eliza was dancing frantically about her sister as if bent on making a *suttee* of herself, while George Washington hung out of window, roaring, "Fire!" "Water!" "Engine!" "Pa!" with a presence of mind worthy of his sex.

A speedy application of the hearth-rug quenched the conflagration, and when a minute burn had been enveloped in cotton-wool, like a gem, a coroner sat upon the pinafore and investigated the case.

It appeared that the ladies were "only playing paper-dolls," when Wash, sighing for the enlightenment of his race, proposed to make a bonfire, and did so with an old book; but Gusty, with a firm belief in future punishment, tried to save it, and fell a victim to her principles, as the virtuous are very apt to do.

The book was brought into court, and proved to be an ancient volume of ballads, cut, torn, and half consumed. Several peculiarly developed paper-dolls, branded here and there with large letters, like galley-slaves, were then produced by the accused, and the judge could with difficulty preserve her gravity, when she found "John Gilpin" converted into a painted petticoat; "The Bay of Biscay, O," situated in the crown of a hat; and "Chevy Chase" issuing from the mouth of a triangular gentleman, who, like Dickens's

cherub, probably sung it by ear, having no lungs to speak of.

It was further apparent from the agricultural appearance of the room, that beans had been sown broadcast by means of the apple-corer, which Wash had converted into a pop-gun with a mechanical ingenuity worthy of more general appreciation. He felt this deeply, and when Christie reproved him for leading his sisters astray, he resented the liberty she took, and retired in high dudgeon to the cellar, where he appeared to set up a menagerie—for bears, lions, and unknown animals, endowed with great vocal powers, were heard to solicit patronage from below.

Somewhat exhausted by her labours, Christie rested, after clearing up the room, while the children found a solace for all afflictions in the consumption of relays of bread and molasses, which infantile restorative occurred like an inspiration to the mind of their guardian.

Peace reigned for fifteen minutes; then came a loud crash from the cellar, followed by a violent splashing, and wild cries of

"Oh, oh, oh, I've fell into the pork-barrel! I'm drownin', I'm drownin'!"

Down rushed Christie, and the sticky innocents ran screaming after, to behold their pickled brother fished up from the briny deep. A spectacle well calculated to impress upon their infant minds the awful consequences of straying from the paths of virtue.

At this crisis Mrs. Wilkins providentially appeared, breathless, but brisk and beaming, and in nowise dismayed by the plight of her luckless son, for a ten years' acquaintance with Wash's dauntless nature had inured his mother to "didoes" that would have appalled most women.

"Go right up chamber, and change every rag on you, and don't come down agin till I rap on the ceilin'; you dreadful boy, disgracin' your family by sech actions. I'm sorry I was kep' so long, but Mis Plumly got tellin' her werryments, and 'peared to take so much comfort in it I couldn't bear to stop her. Then I jest run round to your place and told that woman that you was safe and well, along'r friends, and would call in to-morrer to

get your things. She'd been so scart by your not comin' home that she was as mild as milk, so you won't have no trouble with her, I expect."

"Thank you very much! How kind you are, and how tired you must be! Sit down and let me take your things," cried Christie, more relieved than she could express.

"Lor', no, I'm fond of walkin', but bein' ruther hefty it takes my breath away some to hurry. I'm afraid these children have tuckered you out though. They are proper good gen'lly, but when they do take to trainen' they're a sight of care," said Mrs. Wilkins, as she surveyed her imposing bonnet with calm satisfaction.

"I've enjoyed it very much, and it's done me good, for I haven't laughed so much for six months as I have this afternoon," answered Christie, and it was quite true, for she had been too busy to think of herself or her woes.

"Wal, I thought likely it would chirk you up some, or I shouldn't have went," and Mrs. Wilkins put away a contented smile with her

cherished bonnet, for Christie's face had grown so much brighter since she saw it last, that the good woman felt sure her treatment was the right one.

At supper Lisha reappeared, and while his wife and children talked incessantly, he ate four slices of bread and butter, three pieces of pie, five dough-nuts, and drank a small ocean of tea out of his saucer. Then, evidently feeling that he had done his duty like a man, he gave Christie another nod, and disappeared again without a word.

When she had done up her dishes Mrs. Wilkins brought out a few books and papers, and said to Christie, who sat apart by the window, with the old shadow creeping over her face,—

"Now don't feel lonesome, my dear, but jest lop right down on the soffy and have a sociable kind of a time. Lisha's gone down street for the evenin'. I'll keep the children as quiet as one woman can, and you may read, or rest, or talk, jest as you're a mind."

"Thank you; I'll sit here and rock little Vic to sleep for you. I don't care to read,

but I'd like to have you talk to me, for it seems as if I'd known you a long time and it does me good," said Christie, as she settled herself and baby on the old settee which had served as a cradle for six young Wilkinses, and now received the honourable name of sofa in its old age.

Mrs. Wilkins looked gratified, as she settled her brood round the table with a pile of pictorial papers to amuse them. Then having laid herself out to be agreeable, she sat thoughtfully rubbing the bridge of her nose, at a loss how to begin. Presently Christie helped her by an involuntary sigh.

"What's the matter, dear? Is there anything I can do to make you comfortable?" asked the kind soul, alert at once, and ready to offer sympathy.

"I'm very cosy, thank you, and I don't know why I sighed. It's a way I've got into when I think of my worries," explained Christie, in haste.

"Wal, dear, I wouldn't ef I was you. Don't keep turnin' your troubles over. Git atop of 'em somehow, and stay there ef

you can," said Mrs. Wilkins, very earnestly.

"But that's just what I can't do. I've lost all my spirits and courage, and got into a dismal state of mind. You seem to be very cheerful, and yet you must have a good deal to try you sometimes. I wish you'd tell me how you do it;" and Christie looked wistfully into that other face, so plain, yet so placid, wondering to see how little poverty, hard work, and many cares had soured or saddened it.

"Really I don't know, unless it's jest doin' whatever comes along, and doin' of it heartily, sure that things is all right, though very often I don't see it at fust."

"Do you see it at last?"

"Gen'lly I do; and if I don't I take it on trust, same as children do what older folks tell 'em; and byme-by when I'm grown up in spiritual things I'll understan', as the dears do when they git to be men and women."

That suited Christie, and she thought hopefully within herself,—

"This woman has got the sort of religion I want, if it makes her what she is. Some

day I'll get her to tell me where she found it." Then aloud she said,—

"But it's *so* hard to be patient and contented when nothing happens as you want it to, and you don't get your share of happiness, no matter how much you try to deserve it."

"It ain't easy to bear, I know, but having tried my own way and made a dreadful mess of it, I concluded that the Lord knows what's best for us, and things go better when He manages than when we go scratchin' round and can't wait."

"Tried your own way? How do you mean?" asked Christie curiously; for she liked to hear her hostess talk, and found something besides amusement in the conversation, which seemed to possess a fresh country flavour as well as country phrases.

Mrs. Wilkins smiled all over her plump face, as if she liked to tell her experience, and having hunched sleepy little Andy more comfortably in her lap, and given a preparatory hem or two, she began with great goodwill.

"It happened a number a years ago and

ain't much of a story any way; but you're welcome to it: as some of it is rather humorsome, the laugh may do you good ef the story don't. We was livin' down to the east'ard at the time. It was a real pretty place; the house stood under a couple of maples and a gret brook come foamin' down the rayvine and away through the medders to the river. Dear sakes, seems as ef I see it now, jest as I used to settin' on the doorsteps with the laylocks all in blow, the squirrels jabberin' on the wall, and the saw-mill screekin' way off by the dam."

Pausing a moment, Mrs. Wilkins looked musingly at the steam of the tea-kettle, as if through its silvery haze she saw her early home again. Wash promptly roused her from this reverie by falling off the boiler with a crash. His mother picked him up and placidly went on, falling more and more into the country dialect which city life had not yet polished.

"I oughter hev been the contentedest woman alive, but I warn't, for you see I'd worked at millineryin' before I was married,

and had an easy time on't. Afterwards the children come along pretty fast, there was sights of work to do, and no time for pleasurin', so I got wore out, and used to hanker after old times in a dreadful wicked way.

"Finally I got acquainted with a Mis Bascum, and she done me a sight of harm. You see, havin' few pies of her own to bake, she was fond of puttin' her fingers into her neighbourses, but she done it so neat that no one mistrusted she was takin' all the sauce and leavin' all the crust to them, as you may say. Wal, I told her my werryments and she sympathized real hearty, and said I didn't ought to stan' it, but have things to suit me, and enjoy myself, as other folks did. So when she put it into my head I thought it amazin' good advice, and jest went and done as she told me.

"Lisha was the kindest man you ever see, so when I up and said I warn't goin' to drudge round no more, but must hev a girl, he got one, and goodness knows what a trial *she* was. After she came I got dreadful slack, and left the house and the children to

Hen'retta, and went pleasurin' frequent all in my best. I always *was* a dressy woman in them days, and Lisha give me his earnin's real lavish, bless his heart! and I went and spent 'em on my sinful gowns and bunnets."

Here Mrs. Wilkins stopped to give a remorseful groan and stroke her faded dress, as if she found great comfort in its dinginess.

"It ain't no use tellin' all I done, but I had full swing, and at fust I thought luck was in my dish sure. But it warn't, seein' I didn't deserve it, and I had to take my mess of trouble, which was needful and nourishin', ef I'd had the grace to see it so.

"Lisha got into debt, and no wonder, with me a wastin' of his substance; Hen'retta went off suddin', with whatever she could lay her hands on, and everything was at sixes and sevens. Lisha's patience give out at last, for I was dreadful fractious, knowin' it was all my fault. The children seemed to git out of sorts, too, and acted like Time in the primer, with croup and pins, and whoopin'-cough and temper. I declare I used to think

the pots and kettles biled over to spite each other and me too in them days.

"All this was nuts to Mis Bascum, and she kep' advisin' and encouragin' of me, and I didn't see through her a mite, or guess that settin' folks by the ears was as relishin' to her as bitters is to some. Merciful, suz! what a piece a work we did make betwixt us! I scolded and moped 'cause I couldn't have my way; Lisha swore and threatened to take to drinkin' ef I didn't make home more comfortable; the children run wild, and the house was gittin' too hot to hold us, when we was brought up with a round turn, and I see the redicklousness of my doin's in time.

"One day Lisha come home tired and cross, for bills was pressin', work slack, and folks talkin' about us as ef they'd nothin' else to do. I was dishin' up dinner, feelin' as nervous as a witch, for a whole batch of bread had burnt to a cinder while I was trimmin' a new bunnet, Wash had scart me most to death swallerin' a cent, and the steak had been on the floor more'n once, owin' to

my havin' babies, dogs, cats, or hens under my feet the whole blessed time.

"Lisha looked as black as thunder, throwed his hat into a corner, and came along to the sink where I was skinnin' pertaters. As he washed his hands, I asked what the matter was; but he only muttered and slopped, and I couldn't git nothin' out of him, for he ain't talkative at the best of times as you see, and when he's werried corkscrews wouldn't draw a word from him.

"Bein' riled myself didn't mend matters, and so we fell to hectorin' one another right smart. He said somethin' that dreened my last drop of patience; I give a sharp answer, and fust thing I knew he up with his hand and slapped me. It warn't a hard blow by no means, only a kind of a wet spat side of the head; but I thought I should have flew, and was as mad as ef I'd been knocked down. You never see a man look so 'shamed as Lisha did, and ef I'd been wise I should have made up the quarrel then. But I was a fool. I jest flung fork, dish, pertaters and all into the pot, and says, as ferce as you please,—

"Lisha Wilkins, when you can treat me decent you may come and fetch me back; you won't see me till then, and so I tell you."

"Then I made a bee-line for Mis Bascum's; told her the whole story, had a good cry, and was all ready to go home in half-an-hour, but Lisha didn't come.

"Wal, that night passed, and what a long one it was to be sure! and me without a wink of sleep, thinkin' of Wash and the cent, my emptins and the baby. Next day come, but no Lisha, no message, no nuthin', and I began to think I'd got my match though I had a sight of grit in them days. I sewed, and Mis Bascum she clacked; but I didn't say much, and jest worked like sixty to pay for my keep, for I warn't goin' to be beholden to her for nothin'.

"The day dragged on terrible slow, and at last I begged her to go and git me a clean dress, for I'd come off jest as I was, and folks kep' droppin' in, for the story was all round, thanks to Mis Bascum's long tongue.

"Wal, she went, and ef you'll believe me,

Lisha wouldn't let her in! He handed my best things out a winder, and told her to tell me they were gittin' along fust rate, with Florindy Walch to do the work. He hoped I'd have a good time, and not expect him for a consider'ble spell, for he liked a quiet house, and now he'd got it.

"When I heard that, I knew he must be provoked the wust kind, for he ain't a hash man by nater. I could have crep' in at the winder ef he wouldn't open the door, I was so took down by that message. But Mis Bascum wouldn't hear of it, and kep' stirrin' of me up till I was ashamed to eat 'umble pie fust; so I waited to see how soon he'd come round. But he had the best on't you see, for he'd got the babies and lost a cross wife, while I'd lost everything but Mis Bascum, who grew hatefuler to me every hour, for I begun to mistrust she was a mischief-maker—widders most always is—seein' how she pampered up my pride and 'peared to like the quarrel.

"I thought I should have died more'n once, for sure as you live it went on three

mortal days, and of all miser'ble creeters I was the miser'blest. Then I see how wicked and ungrateful I'd been; how I'd shirked my bounden duty and scorned my best blessins. There warn't a hard job that ever I'd hated but what grew easy when I remembered who it was done for; there warn't a trouble or a care that I wouldn't have welcomed hearty, nor one hour of them dear fractious babies that didn't seem precious when I'd gone and left 'em. I'd got time to rest enough now, and might go pleasuring all day long; but I couldn't do it, and would have given a dozin bunnets trimmed to kill ef I could only have been back moilin' in my old kitchen with the children hangin' round me and Lisha a comin' in cheerful from his work as he used to 'fore I spoilt his home for him. How sing'lar it is folks never *do* know when they are wal off!"

"I know it now," said Christie, rocking lazily to and fro, with a face almost as tranquil as little Vic's, lying half asleep in her lap.

"Glad to hear it, my dear. As I was goin'

on to say, when Saturday come, a tremenjus storm set in, and it rained guns all day. I never shall forgit it, for I was hankerin' after baby, and dreadful werried about the others, all bein' croupy, and Florindy with no more idee of nussin' than a baa lamb. The rain come down like a reg'lar deluge, but I didn't seem to have no ark to run to. As night come on things got wuss and wuss, for the wind blowed the roof off Mis Bascum's barn and stove in the butt'ry window; the brook riz and went ragin' every which way, and you never did see such a piece of work.

"My heart was most broke by that time, and I knew I should give in 'fore Monday. But I set and sewed and listened to the tinkle tankle of the drops in the pans set round to ketch 'em, for the house leaked like a sieve. Mis Bascum was down suller putterin' about, for every kag and sarce jar was afloat. Moses, her brother, was lookin' after his stock and tryin' to stop the damage. All of a sudden he bust in lookin' kinder wild, and settin' down the lantern, he sez, sez he: 'You're ruther an unfortinate woman to-night, Mis

Wilkins.' 'How so?' sez I, as if nuthin' was the matter already.

"'Why,' sez he, 'the spilins have give way up in the rayvine, and the brook's come down like a river, upsot your lean-to, washed the mellion patch slap into the road, and while your husband was tryin' to git the pig out of the pen, the water took a turn and swep him away.'

"'Drownded?' sez I, with only breath enough for that one word. 'Shouldn't wonder,' sez Moses, 'nothin' ever did come up alive after goin' over them falls.'

"It come over me like a streak of lightnin'; everythin' kinder slewed round, and I dropped in the first faint I ever had in my life. Next I knew Lisha was holdin' of me and cryin' fit to kill himself. I thought I was dreamin', and only had wits enough to give a sort of permiscuous grab at him and call out,—

"'Oh, Lisha! ain't you drownded?' He give a gret start at that, swallered down his sobbin', and sez as lovin' as ever a man did in this world,—

"'Bless your dear heart, Cynthy, it warn't

me, it was the pig ;' and then fell to kissin' of me, till betwixt laughin' and cryin' I was most choked. Deary me, it all comes back so livin' real it kinder takes my breath away."

And well it might, for the good soul entered so heartily into her story that she unconsciously embellished it with dramatic illustrations. At the slapping episode she flung an invisible "fork, dish, and pertaters" into an imaginary kettle, and glared; when the catastrophe arrived, she fell back upon her chair to express fainting; gave Christie's arm the "permiscuous grab" at the proper moment, and uttered the repentant Lisha's explanation with an incoherent pathos that forbid a laugh at the sudden introduction of the porcine martyr.

"What did you do then?" asked Christie, in a most flattering state of interest.

"Oh, law! I went right home and hugged them children for a couple of hours stiddy," answered Mrs. Wilkins, as if but one conclusion was possible.

"Did all your troubles go down with the pig?" asked Christie presently.

"Massy, no, we're all poor feeble worms, and the best meanin' of us fails too often," sighed Mrs. Wilkins, as she tenderly adjusted the sleepy head of the young worm in her lap. "After that scrape I done my best; Lisha was as meek as a whole flock of sheep, and we give Mis Bascum a wide berth. Things went lovely for ever so long, and though, after a spell, we had our ups and downs, as is but natural to human creeters, we never come to such a pass agin. Both on us tried real hard; whenever I felt my temper risin' or discontent comin' on I remembered them days and kep' a taut rein; and as for Lisha he never said a raspin' word, or got sulky, but what he'd bust out laughin' after it and say, 'Bless you, Cynthy, it warn't me, it was the pig.'"

Mrs. Wilkins' hearty laugh fired a long train of lesser ones, for the children recognized a household word. Christie enjoyed the joke, and even the tea-kettle boiled over as if carried away by the fun.

"Tell some more, please," said Christie, when the merriment subsided, for she felt her spirits rising.

"There's nothin' more to tell, except one thing that prevented my ever forgittin' the lesson I got then. My little Almiry took cold that week and pined away rapid. She'd always been so ailin' I never expected to raise her, and more'n once in them sinful tempers of mine I'd thought it would be a mercy ef she was took out of her pain. But when I laid away that patient, sufferin' little creeter, I found she was the dearest of 'em all. I most broke my heart to hev her back, and never, never forgive myself for leavin' her that time."

With trembling lips and full eyes Mrs. Wilkins stopped to wipe her features generally on Andrew Jackson's pinafore, and heave a remorseful sigh.

"And this is how you came to be the cheerful, contented woman you are?" said Christie, hoping to divert the mother's mind from that too tender memory.

"Yes," she answered thoughtfully, "I told you Lisha was a smart man; he give me a good lesson, and it set me to thinkin' serious. 'Pears to me trouble is a kind of mellerin'

process, and ef you take it kindly it doos you good, and you learn to be glad of it. I'm sure Lisha and me is twice as fond of one another, twice as willin' to work, and twice as patient with our trials sense dear little Almiry died, and times was hard. I ain't what I ought to be, not by a long chalk; but I try to live up to my light, do my duty cheerful, love my neighbours, and fetch up my family in the fear of God. Ef I do this the best way I know how, I'm sure I'll get my rest some day, and the good Lord won't forgit Cynthy Wilkins. He ain't so fur, for I keep my health wonderfle, Lisha is kind and stiddy, the children flourishin', and I'm a happy woman though I be a humly one."

There she was mistaken, for as her eye roved round the narrow room, from the old hat on the wall to the curly heads bobbing here and there, contentment, piety, and mother-love made her plain face beautiful.

"That story has done me ever so much good, and I shall not forget it. Now, good-night, for I must be up early to-morrow, and I don't want to drive Mr. Wilkins away

entirely," said Christie, after she had helped put the little folk to bed, during which process she had heard her host creaking about the kitchen as if afraid to enter the sitting-room.

She laughed as she spoke, and ran up-stairs, wondering if she could be the same forlorn creature who had crept so wearily up only the night before.

It was a very humble little sermon that Mrs. Wilkins had preached to her, but she took it to heart, and profited by it; for she was a pupil in the great charity school where the best teachers are often unknown, unhonoured here, but who surely will receive commendation and reward from the head master when their long vacation comes.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. WILKINS'S MINISTER.

NEXT day Christie braved the lion in his den, otherwise the flinty Flint, in her second-class boarding-house, and found that alarm and remorse had produced a softening effect upon her. She was unfeignedly glad to see her lost lodger safe; and finding that the new friends were likely to put her in the way of paying her debts, this much harassed matron permitted her to pack up her possessions, leaving one trunk as a sort of hostage. Then, with promises to redeem it as soon as possible, Christie said good-bye to the little room where she had hoped and suffered, lived and laboured so long, and went joyfully back to the humble home she had found with the good laundress.

All the following week Christie "chored round," as Mrs. Wilkins called the miscellaneous light work she let her do. Much washing, combing, and clean pinaforing of children fell to her share, and she enjoyed it amazingly; then, when the elder ones were packed off to school, she lent a hand to any of the numberless tasks housewives find to do from morning till night. In the afternoon, when other work was done, and little Vic asleep or happy with her playthings, Christie clapped laces, sprinkled muslins, and picked out edgings at the great table where Mrs. Wilkins stood ironing, fluting, and crimping till the kitchen bristled all over with immaculate frills and flounces.

It was pretty delicate work, and Christie liked it, for Mrs. Wilkins was an adept at her trade, and took as much pride and pleasure in it as any French *blanchisseuse* tripping through the streets of Paris, with a tree full of coquettish caps, capes, and petticoats borne before her by a half-invisible boy.

Being women, of course they talked as industriously as they worked; fingers flew and

tongues clacked with equal profit and pleasure, and, by Saturday, Christie had made up her mind that Mrs. Wilkins was the most sensible woman she ever knew. Her grammar was an outrage upon the memory of Lindley Murray, but the goodness of her heart would have done honour to any saint in the calendar. She was very plain, and her manners were by no means elegant; but good temper made that homely face most lovable, and natural refinement of soul made mere external polish of small account. Her shrewd ideas and odd sayings amused Christie very much, while her good sense and bright way of looking at things did the younger woman a world of good.

Mr. Wilkins devoted himself to the making of shoes and the consumption of food, with the silent regularity of a placid animal. His one dissipation was tobacco, and in a fragrant cloud of smoke he lived and moved and had his being so entirely that he might have been described as a pipe with a man somewhere behind it. Christie once laughingly spoke of this habit, and declared she would

try it herself if she thought it would make her as quiet and undemonstrative as Mr. Wilkins, who, to tell the truth, made no more impression on her than a fly.

"I don't approve on 't, but he might do wuss. We all have to have our comfort somehow, so I let Lisha smoke as much as he likes, and he lets me gab, so it's about fair, I reckon," answered Mrs. Wilkins, from the suds.

She laughed as she spoke, but something in her face made Christie suspect that at some period of his life Lisha had done "wuss;" and subsequent observations confirmed this suspicion and another one also—that his good wife had saved him, and was gently easing him back to self-control and self-respect. But, as old Fuller quaintly says, "She so gently folded up his faults in silence that few guessed them," and loyally paid him that respect which she desired others to bestow. It was always "Lisha and me," "I'll ask my husband," or "Lisha will know; he don't say much, but he's a dreadful smart man," and she kept up the

fiction so dear to her wifely soul by endowing him with her own virtues, and giving him the credit of her own intelligence.

Christie loved her all the better for this devotion, and for her sake treated Mr. Wilkins as if he possessed the strength of Samson and the wisdom of Solomon. He received her respect as if it was his due, and now and then graciously accorded her a few words beyond the usual scanty allowance of morning and evening greetings. At his shop all day, she only saw him at meals and sometimes of an evening, for Mrs. Wilkins tried to keep him at home safe from temptation, and Christie helped her by reading, talking, and frollicking with the children, so that he might find home attractive. He loved his babies, and would even relinquish his precious pipe for a time to ride the little chaps on his foot, or amuse Vic with shadow rabbits on the wall.

At such times the entire content in Mrs. Wilkins's face made tobacco fumes endurable, and the burden of a dull man's presence less oppressive to Christie, who loved to pay her debts in something besides money.

As they sat together finishing off some delicate laces that Saturday afternoon, Mrs. Wilkins said, "Ef it's fair to-morrow I want you to go to my meetin' and hear my minister. It'll do you good."

"Who is he?"

"Mr. Power."

Christie looked rather startled, for she had heard of Thomas Power as a rampant radical and infidel of the deepest dye, and been warned never to visit that den of iniquity called his free church.

"Why, Mrs. Wilkins, you don't mean it!" she said, leaving her lace to dry at the most critical stage.

"Yes, I do!" answered Mrs. Wilkins, setting down her flat-iron with emphasis, and evidently preparing to fight valiantly for her minister, as most women will.

"I beg your pardon; I was a little surprised, for I had heard all sorts of things about him," Christie hastened to say.

"Did you ever hear *him*, or read any of his writin's?" demanded Mrs. Wilkins, with a calmer air.

"Never."

"Then don't judge. You go hear and see that blessed man; and ef you don't say he's the shadow of a great rock in a desert land, I'll give up," cried the good woman, waxing poetical in her warmth.

"I will to please you, if nothing else. I did go once just because I was told not to; but he did not preach that day, and every thing was so peculiar, I didn't know whether to like it or be shocked."

"It is kind of sing'lar at fust, I'm free to confess, and not as churchy as some folks like. But there ain't no place but that big enough to hold the crowds that want to go; for the more he's abused the more folks flock to see him. They git their money's wuth, I do believe; for though there ain't no pulpits and pews, there's a sight of brotherly love round in them seats, and pious practice, as well as powerful preaching in that shabby desk. *He* don't need no commandments painted up behind him to read on Sunday, for he keeps 'em in his heart and life all the week as honest as man can."

There Mrs. Wilkins paused, flushed and

breathless with her defence, and Christie said candidly, "I did like the freedom and good-will there, for the people sat where they liked, and no one frowned over shut pew-doors at me a stranger. An old black woman sat next to me, and said, 'Amen' when she liked what she heard, and a very shabby young man was on the other, listening as if his soul was as hungry as his body. People read books, laughed and cried, clapped when pleased, and hissed when angry; that I did not like."

"No more does Mr. Power, he don't mind the cryin' and the smilin' as it's nat'ral; but noise and disrespect of no kind ain't pleasin' to him. His own folks behave becomin', but strangers go and act as they like, thinking that there ain't no bounds to the word 'free.' Then we are picked at for their doin's, and Mr. Power has to carry other folkses' sins on his shoulders. But, dear suz, it ain't much matter after all, ef the inside is well meanin'. Children always make a noise a strivin' after what they want most, and I shouldn't wonder ef the

Lord forgive all our short-comin's of that sort, sense we are hankerin' and reachin' for the truth."

"I wish I *had* heard Mr. Power that day, for I was striving after peace with all my heart, and he might have given it to me," said Christie, interested and impressed with what she heard.

"Wal, no, dear, I guess not. Peace ain't give to no one all of a sudden, it gen'lly comes through much tribulation, and the sort that comes hardest is best wuth havin'. Mr. Power would a' ploughed and harrered you, so to speak, and sowed good seed liberal; then ef you warn't barren ground, things would have throve, and the Lord give you a harvest accordin' to your labour. Who did you hear?" asked Mrs. Wilkins, pausing to starch and clap vigorously.

"A very young man who seemed to be airing his ideas and beliefs in the frankest manner. He belaboured everybody and everything, upset Church and State, called names, arranged heaven and earth to suit himself, and evidently meant every word he

said. Much of it would have been ridiculous if the boy had not been so thoroughly in earnest; sincerity always commands respect, and though people smiled, they liked his courage, and seemed to think he would make a man when his spiritual wild oats were sown."

"I ain't a doubt on't. We often have such, and they ain't all empty talk, nuther; some of 'em are surprisingly bright, and all mean so well, I don't never reluct to hear 'em. They must blow off their steam somewheres, else they'd bust with the big idees a swellin' in 'em; Mr. Power knows it and gives 'em the chance they can't find nowheres else. 'Pears to me," added Mrs. Wilkins, ironing rapidly as she spoke, "that folks is very like clothes, and a sight has to be done to keep 'em clean and whole. All on us has to lend a hand in this dreadful mixed-up wash, and each do our part, same as you and me is now. There's scrubbin' and bilin,' wrenchin' and bluein',dryin' and foldin', ironin' and polishin', before any of us is fit for wear a Sunday mornin'."

"What part does Mr. Power do?" asked

Christie, much amused at this peculiarly appropriate simile.

"The scrubbin' and the bilin', that's always the hardest and the hottest part. He starts the dirt and gets the stains out, and leaves 'em ready for other folks to finish off. It ain't such pleasant work as hangin' out, or such pretty work as doin' up, but some one's got to do it, and them that's strongest does it best, though they don't git half so much credit as them as polishes and crimps. That's showy work, but it wouldn't be no use ef the things warn't well washed fust," and Mrs. Wilkins thoughtfully surveyed the snowy muslin cap with its border fluted like the petals of a prim white daisy that hung on her hand.

"I'd like to be a washerwoman of that sort; but as I'm not one of the strong, I'll be a laundress, and try to make purity as attractive as you do," said Christie soberly.

"Ah, my dear, it's warm and wearin' work I do assure you, and hard to give satisfaction, try as you may. Crowns of glory ain't wore in this world, but it's my 'pinion that them that does the hard jobs here will stand a good

chance of havin' extra bright ones when they git through."

"I know *you* will," said Christie warmly.

"Land alive, child! I warn't thinking of Cynthy Wilkins, but Mr. Power. I'll be satisfied, ef I can set low down somewheres and see him git the meddle. He won't in this world, but I know there's rewards savin' up for him byme-by."

"I'll go to-morrow, if it pours!" said Christie with decision.

"Do, and I'll lend you my bunnit," cried Mrs. Wilkins, passing with comical rapidity from crowns of glory to her own cherished head-gear.

"Thank you, but I can't wear blue, I look as yellow as a dandelion in it. Mrs. Flint let me have my best things, though I offered to leave them, so I shall be respectable and by and by blossom out."

On the morrow Christie went early, got a good seat, and for half an hour watched the gathering of the motley congregation that filled the great hall. Some came in timidly, as if doubtful of their welcome; some noisily,

as if, as Mrs. Wilkins said, they had not learned the wide difference between liberty and license; many as if eager and curious; and a large number with the look of children gathering round a family table ready to be fed, and sure that wholesome food would be bountifully provided for them.

Christie was struck by the large proportion of young people in the place, of all classes, both sexes, and strongly contrasting faces. Delicate girls looking with the sweet wistfulness of maidenly hearts for something strong to lean upon and love; sad-eyed women turning to heaven for the consolations or the satisfactions earth could not give them; anxious mothers perplexed with many cares, trying to find light and strength; young men with ardent faces, restless, aspiring, and impetuous, longing to do and dare; tired-looking students, with perplexed wrinkles on their foreheads, evidently come to see if this man had discovered the great secrets they were delving after; and soul-sick people trying this new, and perhaps dangerous medicine, when others failed to cure. Many earnest,

thoughtful men and women were there, some on the anxious seat, and some already at peace, having found the clew that leads safely through the labyrinth of life. Here and there a white head, a placid old face, or one of those fine countenances that tell, unconsciously, the beautiful story of a victorious soul.

Some read, some talked, some had flowers in their hands, and all sat at ease, rich and poor, black and white, young and old, waiting for the coming of the man who had power to attract and hold so many of his kind. Christie was so intent on watching those about her that she did not see him enter, and only knew it by the silence which began just in front of her, and seemed to flow backward like a wave, leaving a sea of expectant faces turning to one point. That point was a grey head, just visible above the little desk which stood in the middle of a great platform. A vase of lovely flowers was on the little shelf at one side, a great Bible reposed on the other, and a manuscript lay whitely on the red slope between.

In a moment Christie forgot everything

else, and waited with a curious anxiety to see what manner of man this was. Presently he got up with an open book in his hand, saying, in a strong, cheerful voice, "Let us sing," and having read a hymn as if he had composed it, he sat down again.

Then everybody did sing; not harmoniously, but heartily, led by an organ, which the voices followed at their own sweet will. At first, Christie wanted to smile, for some shouted and some hummed, some sat silent, and others sung sweetly; but before the hymn ended she liked it, and thought that the natural praise of each individual soul was perhaps more grateful to the ear of God than masses by great masters, or psalms warbled tunefully by hired opera-singers.

Then Mr. Power rose again, and laying his hands together, with a peculiarly soft and reverent gesture, lifted up his face and prayed. Christie had never heard a prayer like that before; so devout, so comprehensive, and so brief. A quiet talk with God, asking nothing but more love and duty towards Him and our fellow-men; thanking Him for many mercies,

and confiding all things trustfully to the "dear father and mother of souls."

The sermon which followed was as peculiar as the prayer, and as effective. "One of Power's judgment-day sermons," as she heard one man say to another, when it was over. Christie certainly felt at first as if kingdoms and thrones were going down, and each man being sent to his own place. A powerful and popular wrong was arrested, tried, and sentenced then and there, with a courage and fidelity that made plain words eloquent, and stern justice beautiful. He did not take David of old for his text, but the strong, sinful, splendid Davids of our day, who had not fulfilled the promise of their youth, and whose seeming success was a delusion and a snare to themselves and others, sure to be followed by sorrowful abandonment, defeat, and shame. The ashes of the ancient hypocrites and Pharisees were left in peace, but those now living were heartily denounced; modern money-changers scourged out of the temple, and the everlasting truth set up therein.

As he spoke, not loudly nor vehemently, but with the indescribable effect of inward force and true inspiration, a curious stir went through the crowd at times, as a great wind sweeps over a corn-field, lifting the broad leaves to the light and testing the strength of root and stem. People looked at one another with a roused expression; eyes kindled, heads nodded involuntary approval, and an emphatic, "That's so!" dropped from the lips of men who saw their own vague instincts and silent opinions strongly confirmed and nobly uttered. Consciences seemed to have been pricked to duty, eyes cleared to see that their golden idols had feet of clay, and wavering wills strengthened by the salutary courage and integrity of one indomitable man.

Another hymn, and a benediction that seemed like a fit grace after meat, and then the crowd poured out; not yawning, thinking of best clothes, or longing for dinner, but waked up, full of talk, and eager to do something to redeem the country and the world.

Christie went rapidly home because she

could not help it, and burst in upon Mrs. Wilkins with a face full of enthusiasm, exclaiming, while she cast off her bonnet as if her head had outgrown it since she left,—

"It was splendid! I never heard such a sermon before, and I'll never go to church anywhere else."

"I knew it! ain't it fillin'? don't it give you a kind of spirital h'ist, and make things wuth more somehow?" cried Mrs. Wilkins, gesticulating with the pepper-pot in a way which did not improve the steak she was cooking, and caused great anguish to the noses of her offspring, who were watching the operation.

Quite deaf to the chorus of sneezes which accompanied her words, Christie answered, brushing back her hair, as if to get a better out-look at creation generally,—

"Oh, yes, indeed! At first it was rather terrible, and yet so true, I wouldn't change a word of it. But I don't wonder he is misunderstood, belied, and abused. He tells the truth so plainly, and lets in the light so clearly, that hypocrites and sinners must

fear and hate him. I think he *was* a little hard and unsparing, sometimes, though I don't know enough to judge the men and measures he condemned. I admire him very much, but I should be afraid of him if I ever saw him nearer."

"No, you wouldn't; not a grain. You hear him preach agin and you'll find him as gentle as a lamb. Strong folks is apt to be ruther ha'sh at times; they can't help it no more than this stove can help scorchin' the vittles when it gits red hot. Dinner's ready, so set right up and tell me all about it," said Mrs. Wilkins, slapping the steak on to the platter, and beginning to deal out fried potatoes all round with absent-minded lavishness.

Christie talked, and the good soul enjoyed that far more than her dinner, for she meant to ask Mr. Power to help her find the right sort of home for the stranger, whose unfitness for her present place was every day made more apparent to the mind of her hostess.

"What took you there first?" asked

Christie, still wondering at Mrs. Wilkins's choice of a minister.

"The Lord, my dear," answered the good woman, in a tone of calm conviction. "I'd heard of him, and I always have a leanin' towards them that's reviled; so one Sabbath I felt to go, and did. 'That's the gospel for me,' says I, 'my old church ain't big enough now, and I ain't goin' to set and nod there any longer,' and I didn't."

"Hadn't you any doubts about it, any fears of going wrong or being sorry afterwards?" asked Christie, who believed, as many do, that religion could not be attained without much tribulation of some kind.

"In some things folks is led; I be frequent, and when them leadin's come I don't ask no questions but jest foller, and it always turns out right."

"I wish I could be led."

"You be, my dear, every day of your life, only you don't see it. When you are doubtful, set still till the call comes, then git up and walk whichever way it says, and you won't fall. You've had bread and water long

enough, now you want meat and wine a spell; take it, and when it's time for milk and honey some one will fetch 'em ef you keep your table ready. The Lord feeds us right, it's we that quarrel with our vittles."

"I will," said Christie, and began at once to prepare her little board for the solid food of which she had had a taste that day.

That afternoon Mrs. Wilkins took her turn at church-going, saw Mr. Power, told Christie's story in her best style, and ended by saying,—

"She's true grit, I do assure you, sir. Willin' to work, but she's seen the hard side of things and got kind of discouraged. Soul and body both wants tinkerin' up, and I don't know anybody who can do the job better'n you can."

"Very well, I'll come and see her," answered Mr. Power, and Mrs. Wilkins went home well satisfied.

He kept his word, and about the middle of the week came walking in upon them as they were at work.

"Don't let the irons cool," he said, and

sitting down in the kitchen, began to talk as comfortably as if in the best parlour; more so, perhaps, for best parlours are apt to have a depressing effect upon the spirits, while the mere sight of labour is exhilarating to energetic minds.

He greeted Christie kindly, and then addressed himself to Mrs. Wilkins on various charitable matters, for he was a minister at large, and she one of his almoners. Christie could really see him now, for when he preached she forgot the man in the sermon, and thought of him only of visible conscience.

A sturdy man of fifty, with a keen, brave face, penetrating eyes, and mouth a little grim; but a voice so resonant and sweet, it reminded one of silver trumpets, and stirred and won the hearer with irresistible power. Rough grey hair, and all the features rather rugged, as if the Great Sculptor had blocked out a grand statue and left the man's own soul to finish it.

Had Christie known that he came to see *her*, she would have been ill at ease; but Mrs. Wilkins had kept her own counsel, so

when Mr. Power turned to Christie, saying,—

"My friend here tells me you want something to do. Would you like to help a Quaker lady with her house-work, just out of town?"

She answered readily,—

"Yes, sir, anything that is honest."

"Not as a servant exactly, but companion and helper. Mrs. Sterling is a dear old lady, and the place a pleasant little nest. It is good to be there, and I think you'll say so if you go."

"It sounds pleasant. When shall I go?"

Mr. Power smiled at her alacrity, but the longing look in her eyes explained it, for he saw at a glance that her place was not here.

"I will write at once and let you know how matters are settled. Then you shall try it, and if it is not what you want, we will find you something else. There's plenty to do, and nothing pleasanter than to put the right pair of hands to the right task. Good-bye; come and see me if the spirit moves, and don't let go of Mrs. Wilkins till you lay hold of a better friend, if you can find one."

Then he shook hands cordially, and went walking out again into the wild March weather as if he liked it.

"Were you afraid of him?" asked Mrs. Wilkins.

"I forgot all about it: he looked so kind and friendly. But I shouldn't like to have those piercing eyes of his fixed on me long if I had any secret on my conscience," answered Christie.

"You ain't nothin' to fear. He liked your way of speakin' fust rate, I see that, and you'll be all right now he's took hold."

"Do you know Mrs. Sterling?"

"Only by sight, but she's a sweet appearin' woman, and I wouldn't ask nothin' better'n to see more of her," said Mrs. Wilkins warmly, fearing Christie's heart might misgive her.

But it did not, and when a note came saying Mrs. Sterling would be ready for her the next week she seemed quite content with everything; for, though the wages were not high, she felt that country air and quiet were worth more to her just then than money,

and that Wilkinses were better taken homœopathically.

The spirit did move her to go and see Mr. Power, but she could not make up her mind to pass that invisible barrier which stands between so many who could give one another genuine help if they only dared to ask it. But when Sunday came she went to church, eager for more, and thankful that she knew where to go for it.

This was a very different sermon from the other, and Christie felt as if he preached it for her alone. "Keep innocency and take heed to the thing that is right, for this will bring a man peace at the last," might have been the text, and Mr. Power treated it as if he had known all the trials and temptations that made it hard to live up to.

Justice and righteous wrath possessed him before, now mercy and tenderest sympathy for those who faltered in well-doing, and the stern judge seemed changed to a pitiful father. But better than the pity was the wise counsel, the cheering words, and the devout surrender

of the soul to its best instincts, and its close communion with its Maker, unchilled by fear, untrammelled by the narrowness of sect or superstition, but full and free and natural as the breath of life.

As she listened Christie felt as if she was climbing up from a solitary valley, through mist and shadow towards a mountain top, where, though the way might be rough and strong winds blow, she would get a wider outlook over the broad earth, and be nearer the serene blue sky. For the first time in her life religion seemed a visible and vital thing; a power that she could grasp and feel, take into her life and make her daily bread. Not a vague, vast idea floating before her, now beautiful, now terrible, always undefined and far away.

She was strangely and powerfully moved that day, for the ploughing had begun; and when the rest stood up for the last hymn, Christie could only bow her head and let the uncontrollable tears flow down like summer rain, while her heart sang with new aspiration,—

"Nearer, my God, to Thee,
E'en though a cross it be
That raiseth me,
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!"

Sitting with her hand before her eyes, she never stirred till the sound of many feet told her that service was done. Then she wiped her eyes, dropped her veil, and was about to rise when she saw a little bunch of flowers between the leaves of the hymn-book lying open in her lap. Only a knot of violets set in their own broad leaves, but blue as friendly eyes looking into hers, and sweet as kind ears whispered in her ear. She looked about her, hoping to detect and thank the giver; but all faces were turned the other way, and all feet departing rapidly.

Christie followed with a very grateful thought in her heart for this little kindness from some unknown friend, and, anxious to recover herself entirely before she faced Mrs. Wilkins, she took a turn in the park.

The snow was gone, high winds had dried the walk, and a clear sky overhead made one

forget sodden turf and chilly air. March was going out like a lamb, and Christie enjoyed an occasional vernal whiff from far-off fields and wakening woods, as she walked down the broad mall watching the buds on the boughs, and listening to the twitter of the sparrows, evidently discussing the passers-by as they sat at the doors of their little mansions.

Presently she turned to walk back again and saw Mr. Power coming towards her. She was glad, for all her fear had vanished now, and she wanted to thank him for the sermon that had moved her so deeply. He shook hands in his cordial way, and, turning, walked with her, beginning at once to talk of her affairs as if interested in them.

"Are you ready for the new experiment?" he asked.

"Quite ready, sir; very glad to go, and very much obliged to you for your kindness in providing for me."

"That is what we were put into the world for, to help one another. You can pass on the kindness by serving my good friends, who, in return, will do their best for you."

"That's so pleasant! I always knew there were plenty of good, friendly people in the world, only I did not seem to find them often, or be able to keep them long when I did. Is Mr. Sterling an agreeable old man?"

"Very agreeable, but not old. David is about thirty-one or two, I think. He is the son of my friend, the husband died some years ago. I thought I mentioned it."

"You said in your note that Mr. Sterling was a florist, and might like me to help in the green-house, if I was willing. It must be lovely work, and I *should* like it very much."

"Yes, David devotes himself to his flowers, and leads a very quiet life. You may think him rather grave and blunt at first, but you'll soon find him out and get on comfortably, for he is a truly excellent fellow, and my right-hand man in good works."

A curious little change had passed over Christie's face during these last questions and answers, unconscious, but quite observable to keen eyes like Mr. Power's. Surprise and interest appeared first, then a shadow of reserve as if the young woman dropped a thin

veil between herself and the young man, and at the last words a half-smile and a slight raising of the brows seemed to express the queer mixture of pity and indifference with which we are all apt to regard "excellent fellows" and "amiable girls." Mr. Power understood the look, and went on more confidentially than he had at first intended, for he did not want Christie to go off with a prejudice in her mind which might do both David and herself injustice.

"People sometimes misjudge him, for he is rather old-fashioned in manner and plain in speech, and may seem unsocial, because he does not seek society. But those who know the cause of this forgive any little shortcoming for the sake of the genuine goodness of the man. David had a great trouble some years ago, and suffered much. He is learning to bear it bravely, and is the better for it, though the memory of it is still bitter, and the cross hard to bear even with pride to help him to hide it, and principle to keep him from despair."

Mr. Power glanced at Christie as he paused,

and was satisfied with the effect of his words, for interest, pity, and respect shone in her face, and proved that he had touched the right string. She seemed to feel that this little confidence was given for a purpose, and showed that she accepted it as a sort of gage for her own fidelity to her new employers.

"Thank you, sir, I shall remember," she said, with her frank eyes lifted gravely to his own. "I like to work for people whom I can respect," she added, "and will bear with any peculiarities of Mr. Sterling's without a thought of complaint. When a man has suffered through one woman, all women should be kind and patient with him, and try to atone for the wrong which lessens his respect and faith in them.

"There you are right; and in this case all women *should* be kind, for David pities and protects womankind as the only retaliation for the life-long grief one woman brought upon him. That's not a common revenge, is it?"

"It's beautiful!" cried Christie, and instantly David was a hero.

"At one time it was an even chance whether that trouble sent David to 'the devil,' as he expressed it, or made a man of him. That little saint of a mother kept him safe till the first desperation was over, and now he lives for her, as he ought. Not so romantic an ending as a pistol or Byronic scorn for the world in general and women in particular, but dutiful and brave, since it often takes more courage to live than to die."

"Yes, sir," said Christie heartily, though her eyes fell, remembering how she had failed with far less cause for despair than David.

They were at the gate now, and Mr. Power left her, saying, with a vigorous hand-shake,—

"Best wishes for a happy summer. I shall come sometimes to see how you prosper; and remember, if you tire of it and want to change, let me know, for I take great satisfaction in putting the right people in the right places. Good-bye, and God be with you!"

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